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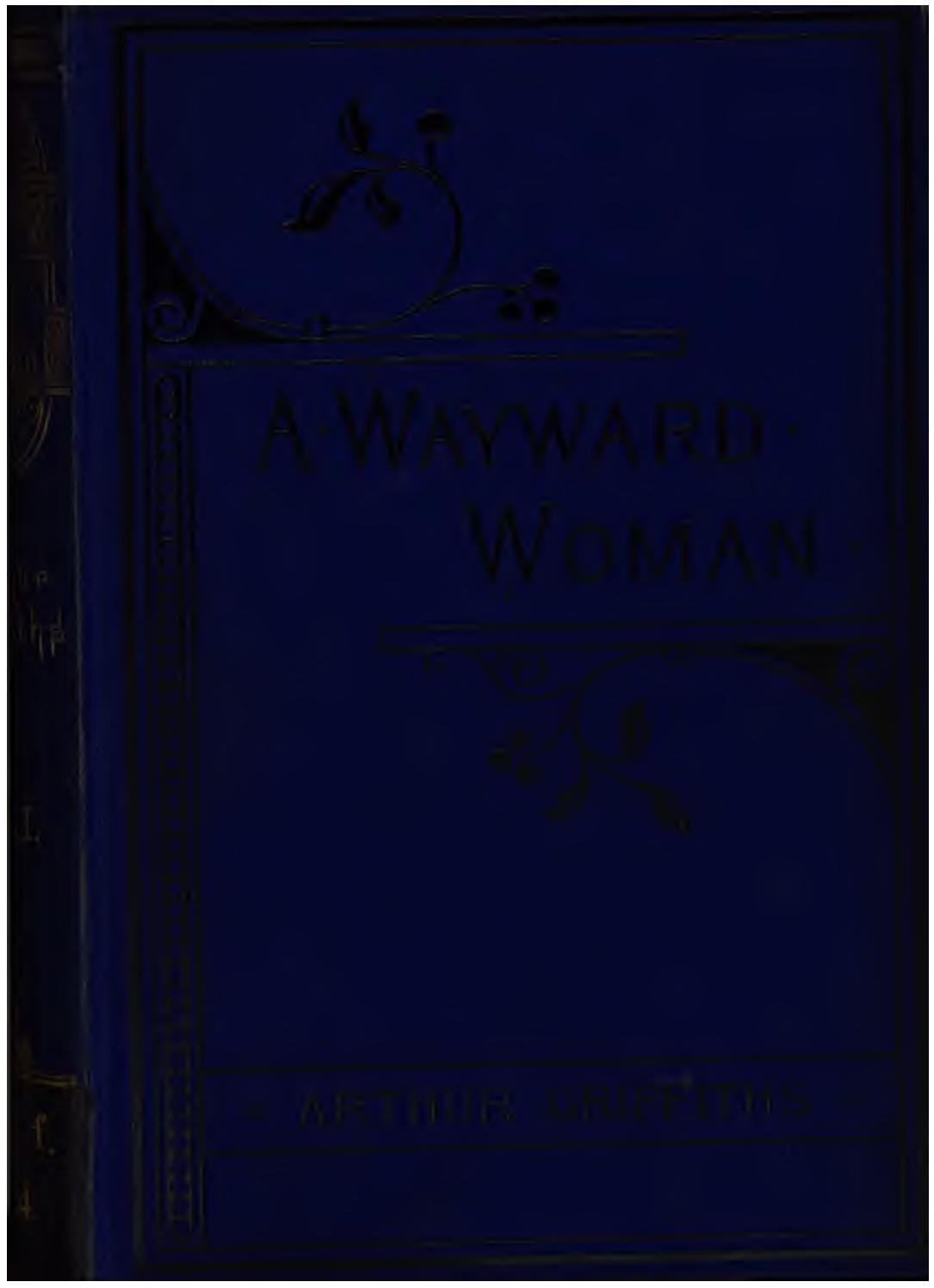
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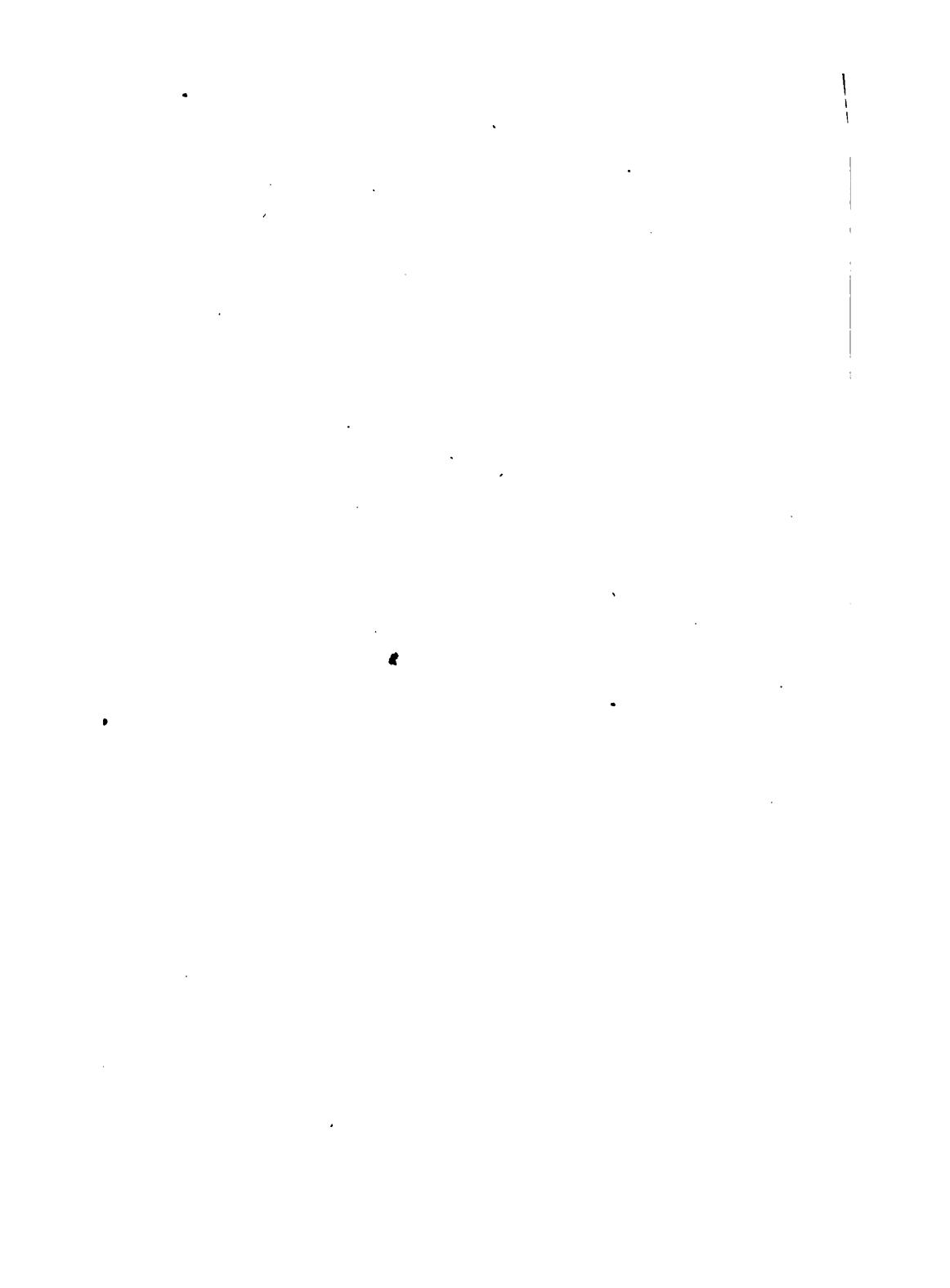
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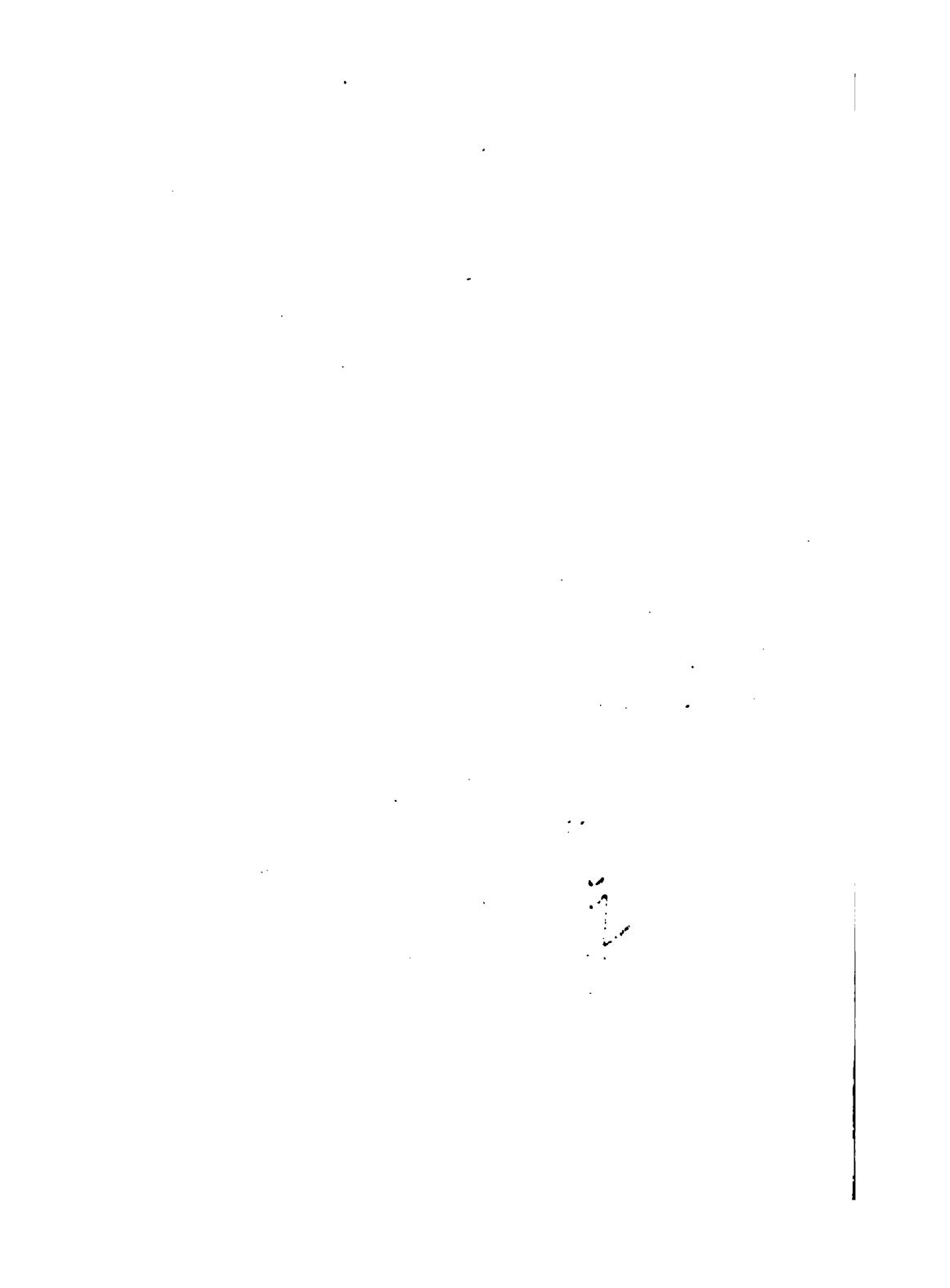






# A WAYWARD WOMAN

*FIRST VOLUME*



# A WAYWARD WOMAN

BY

ARTHUR GRIFFITHS

AUTHOR OF 'LOLA' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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## A WAYWARD WOMAN.

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### CHAPTER I.

WINNIFRED FORSYTH was Colonel Forsyth's only child ; she was born of his first marriage. His second wife was Lady Clementina FitzHugh, Lord FitzHugh's sister ; she had no children, but she owned a pug dog, to which she was devotedly attached.

A very brusque, offhand young lady was Miss Winnifred Forsyth ; an outspoken, independent, fearless, high-spirited girl, not exactly 'fast,' yet able to hold her own with anybody anywhere. Strong-willed, but not disagreeably self-willed, she was simply serenely confident of herself ; without a thought at which even an inexperienced, guileless child could blush, she sometimes said and

did things which might have compromised another.

With men she was a great favourite. They all liked her. There was so much good-humoured, frank *camaraderie* about her, that they looked upon her almost as one of themselves. Women who discussed her, as they often did, and not always approvingly, called her a 'tomboy,' and sneered at her masculine ways. In truth she was more like a cheery, lighthearted schoolboy than a girl. It was with a pang that she found herself too old to play cricket with boy cousins and their friends. She was an admirable horsewoman, and could use a pair of sculls with skill and effect; she was no mean whip, and openly avowed her ambition to drive, some day, a coach-and-four. Such tastes are not rare among young ladies of the present day, and their tendency is often to develop slanginess, at the sacrifice of all feminine softness and grace.

Of this fatal defect Winnifred steered clear. She loved field sports and all vigorous exercise under the free air of heaven, but the

pursuit of these pleasures did not constitute her only joy. Energetic by nature, and in sound, strong health, she leant towards active employment ; she was ready to gallop with the first flight, to dance all night without intermission, to submit to the racket and racing of season after season in town. But if this high-pressure life delighted her, calmer and more rational habits prevailed with her too. Hers was no empty head. She had brains, and had read thoughtfully and much ; natural gifts, which education, finding her a willing pupil, had greatly improved ; musical talents quite above the average : a well trained, highly cultivated voice, and she could play with feeling quiet, dreamy airs in strange contrast with her own physical exuberance of health and spirits ; in the painter's art hers was no mean skill, her execution might fail, but it was from want of practice not from weakness, while she had a right perception and judgment, intuitive and more correct than that of many art critics who dictate terms to the world.

Of course such a many-sided accomplished girl found admirers by the score. Had she been hideous, with wiry hair, coarse features, and a grating voice, she might have done less mischief. Men worship women in the first instance through their eyes—wealth of brain-power slowly asserts itself; it is heavily handicapped, and cannot easily compete with the reflection of winsome personal charms upon the male retina. Unhappily for the peace of mind of many, Winnifred was outwardly attractive in no ordinary measure. Rich brown tresses framed in a fair fresh young face; she had broad open brows, laughing, provoking eyes, and a strong, sensible mouth. Her slight figure was straight as a pillar, but graceful in every line. She was a true type of a comely, honest, wholesome English girl.

Capable if she wished of being all things to all men, her success from the first was undeniable. She made conquests by the dozen; her progress, season after season, was something like a triumphal procession. Strings of

captives followed her car. Each in turn had advanced boldly to the attack, and each in turn had succumbed. Truly she had had no lack of suitors; her chances had been abundant, her field of choice wide. And yet she was now three-and-twenty, and unmarried still. What was to be the end of it all?

Winnifred's unaccountable delay in securing a suitable establishment in life, was a matter of serious chagrin to her father Colonel Forsyth. He wished her to marry well and soon. There were substantial reasons for it. Colonel Forsyth had nothing much to leave behind him. His property was an uncertain, variable quantity; now and again hampered by debts of honour, sometimes jeopardised by an unfortunate notion that he might make a fortune in twenty-four hours by buying and selling stocks. Lady Clementina was passably rich, but she had only a life-interest in certain moneys which would revert at her death to the head of the house. The style in which the Forsyths lived forbade any very rigorous economies. Besides,

Lady Clementina could do what she chose with her savings ; she was not at all certain to bequeath them to Winnifred ; she would have much preferred to have made Fido her heir, could the darling have legally inherited, and failing the dog, her nephew, Bobby FitzHugh, a captain in her Majesty's Scarlet Guards.

Colonel Forsyth was discontented and uneasy, but he confined himself generally to mere hints, having a notion that Winnifred might be driven by over-much remonstrance into perpetual rejection of the offers she continued to receive. There had always been a certain defiance in her attitude towards him. Father and daughter had never been closely intimate. Their paths had lain apart ; she, till his second marriage, at school ; he in London in his snug Albany Chambers, alone, living at his club, and not indifferent to the *menus plaisirs* of a bachelor's life. When—solely on his daughter's account, as he occasionally complained to his friends—he sacrificed his independence for Lady Clementina's

constant society and the comfortable *gîte* in Brook Street, they met only at intervals. He went his own way, which was not that of a young lady just 'come out'; the balls and festivities of which her life was made up had no attractions for him. Her ladyship had been engaged to do duty on all such occasions. Colonel Forsyth preferred a quiet rubber at his club to crowded staircases, where he was jostled by his enemies, and infernal ruffians trod upon his toes.

But although he refrained from taking his daughter openly to task, no compunctions prevented him from pouring his woes into the stepmother's ears. Colonel Forsyth was an irritable fault-finding man; a pessimist, taking always the worst view of life. Things with him were always going to the dogs. He was on the verge of ruin three or four times a week. 'Get better?' if he saw you were ailing—'Not you, you'll never be much better, take my word for that' 'Going to alter your house? Won't improve it. It'll cost you a fortune, and you'll spoil the set of

the whole thing.' 'Rain?' when you asked him whether he thought the weather would hold up—'Of course it will rain; always does in this climate, except when you want; then there's drought, or a frost.'

So now he gave his wife many evil hours. Ruling with despotic sway all those who had not the pluck to resist him, he had conquered Lady Clementina who had long since given in without an attempt at self-defence. She was herself a fidgetting, anxious soul, and besides, an obedient, submissive spouse, eager always to meet his wishes, and escape his reproof. Goaded therefore by his repeated lamentations, she had taken up her parable, and had preached Winnifred many lessons upon the errors of her ways.

The time was slipping by; lost opportunities could never be recovered. These and other platitudes were fired off without intermission, and tickled Winnifred's ears as much as might the buzzings of a dropsical fly. She never set much store by what her stepmother said. Purely negative was the allegiance she

had rendered Lady Clementina ; now and again, in the face of some overt attempt at coercion, Winnifred became absolutely mutinous, impossible to drive. Always—at least since she had been a grown-up, duly introduced young lady—she had made it quite plain that she meant to have her own way. Lady Clementina's cautious counsels were so much wasted breath. When she argued, a little nervously, feeling, perhaps, that the sin of continued failure would be visited by Colonel Forsyth upon her, in favour of settlements and eligible *partis*, Winnifred yawned or laughed outright.

Married ! It was a matter of supreme indifference to her whether she ever married at all. She had not seen a man she cared for one rush, as yet. She certainly had no notion of tying herself for life to any man, except the right man, and he had not yet come in sight. She had never set it before her as the steadfast aim of her maiden prime to achieve an early and brilliant marriage. Others might hunt for husbands ; the

sport was too contemptible and humiliating for her. Others might stalk the young duke running loose about the town, and catch him if they could ; let them marry the Shah of Persia, or a reigning prince if they were so inclined ; she had no such ambition. As for her girl comrades and contemporaries, many of whom had already done so well—perhaps they had ; but one or two had taken up with her leavings, and she wished them joy of their bargains. It was pretty well known how sour was the fruit under Juliana's strawberry leaves ; and if Beatrice had got the tallest carriage horses, and the biggest house in Prince's Gate, she had got also the most atrocious little snob in London as her companion for life.

Then Lady Clementina with patient perseverance changed the venue, and declared that it was perfectly wicked to draw men on as Winnifred did, to encourage their attentions deliberately, and yet to mean nothing all the time. She was fast gaining the character of a desperate and unconscionable flirt.

Sometimes Winnifred laughed the imputation to scorn. Poor young men! So guileless, so simple, so easily deceived! Why did not some philanthropic people organise a society for their protection, seeing they were so manifestly unable to take care of themselves? A girl who refused more than three offers in one year should be brought before a magistrate, and bound over to flirt no more!

This was one line of defence. Another, according to her humour, was to wax hotly indignant, and then positively deny the charge. It was wickedly, cruelly untrue. In any case, how could she help it? People chose to run after her of their own accord. She did not want them; they only embarrassed and bored to death. They were so silly; she never gave them really an atom of encouragement, and yet they chose to fancy things, to draw false conclusions, and hope without reason. If they were disappointed, they had only themselves to thank. It was no fault of hers.

No, truly. Nor is it the fault of the

poacher's night lines that they carry an alluring bait ; nor that there is a bright-plumaged, sweet-voiced decoy bird to attract the spoil to the fowler's nets. But was she altogether blameless ? Perhaps she could not divest herself of her winsome appearance, and her fascinating ways, any more than the magnet can surrender its power. But did she weave no snares ? did she spread no pitfalls for the feet of unwary goers ? There were not wanting others, besides Lady Clementina, to animadvert upon her behaviour. Mothers who resented her monopoly of men, and set it down to fast forwardness ; maidens, a little envious, perhaps, who called her intriguing, deceitful, reckless ; male sufferers, who having fallen into the toils, had emerged again, sore at heart and disappointed for life. Of these, some were in outer darkness hiding their hurts ; travelling perchance up the Yosemite Valley, yachting in the Arctic regions, or shooting in Central Africa about Nyanza and the Zambezi Falls. Others, nearer at home, could speak if they pleased, and sometimes did.

Certainly one or two cases might have been called almost flagrant. Why did Miss Forsyth appear to favour great, hulking, good-natured Jack Grantham, if she only meant to throw him over after all? Their acquaintance had commenced in the hunting-field; she rode as straight as he did himself, and was as fond of it; her seat was perfect, and her hand. Until he met Winnifred he had thought there was no girl exactly cut out for the wife of a M. F. H. Hunting was his passion; and he had been fairly bowled over by Winnifred's personal achievements, and her acquiescence in his tastes. The first frost he followed her up to town, and accepted forthwith the *rôle* of Newfoundland dog, or half-tamed domestic bear. He was perpetually either at Winnifred's heels, or led about, as it were, by a string, to dance and perform antics according to his proprietor's good will. It was a sight to see his stolid but kindly face beaming with pleasure when she bade him fetch and carry, to sit here and go there, and otherwise crucify himself at her com-

mand. People looked upon this affair as quite an accomplished fact, Winnifred's character being as yet but little known. Suddenly Jack Grantham disappeared ; the world of London knew him no more. He had committed an offence which Winnifred could not forgive. He had asked her to be his wife, to share a wide estate, a pack of hounds, and one of the finest country seats in the shires. Winnifred refused him point blank, with a simplicity and directness that could not be misunderstood. Poor old Jack was nearly heartbroken. From henceforth he forswore female society, and retired to devote the remainder of his life to hunting—that first love which would never be likely to play him false.

Beauty Sebright's was the next affair. But in this Winnifred had some excuse. The man was a professed lady-killer, one who might have taken employment as a mild sort of executioner wherever women were redundant, required to be thinned. Winnifred's rejection of Jack Grantham was now known,

and it had established her reputation. She 'went up' in the social stock market, and was more sought after than ever, as sometimes happens when girls put a very high price on themselves, unless their outward appearance gives their own valuation the immediate lie. So she came within Beauty Sebright's range, and he forthwith threw his handkerchief with the avowed intention of making her suffer. A handsome man, a singing man, a man who led cotillons, who was so much *répandu*, so universally courted, might fairly consider himself irresistible. Every house was open to him. Dowagers were at his feet; despair reigned in whole regions of the West End when he refused to sing; girls to get a dance with him would throw over their oldest friends.

To win this exquisite creature's worship was a triumph of which Winnifred was hardly worthy. But she tolerated him; more, she fought him with his own weapons, and was quite as hollow as he was in his expressions of appreciation and regard. She saw through

him very soon, and very soon he bored her terribly. His voice, which had won for him half his success, his bell-like ballad-laden voice, had, to her ears, an untuneful hypocritical ring, and his most impassioned performances failed to touch her in the least. She got tired, too, of his good looks, another of his strong points. He was without conversation, and a man who relies chiefly upon languishing eyes and an expressive nose to do all the talking for him may expect ere long to pall. Someone overheard Winnifred say to him when he was more than usually dull—

‘Pray, Mr. Sebright, do not try to talk, let me sit and look at you, it’s much more satisfactory.’ A speech which was often afterwards repeated.

But Sebright continued to pursue Winnifred with unflagging devotion. His attentions, which had commenced in jest, were carried on now in sober earnest. They promised ere long to end in his despair. As his liking increased hers cooled, but being too self-satis-

fied to anticipate failure, with over-weaning, crass confidence he rushed to his fate.

For once he had met his match.

'I should like to settle down,' he said, at a garden party, when he and Winnifred were sitting apart. He spoke with less composure than might have been expected in one who had been so successful. Years of encouragement from the other sex might have made him more brave.

'Then why don't you? You're like the stuff in the bottles. Give up shaking yourself and you'll settle down.'

'I can't. I have something on my mind.'

'How very bad for your mind. Is it heavy? All about settling I suppose. Isn't that a sporting term? Settling day comes for us all sooner or later, I suppose, but I devoutly hope mine will be indefinitely delayed.'

'Don't say that. It's nearer than you think, perhaps. Due at this very moment if you are so inclined.'

'I am not at all inclined. I don't want to be settled, if you do.'

And she looked him full in the face, meaning him to understand that he had better pause while there was time; or she might 'settle' him in a way he would not like.

'You have no romance in your composition. None of the sentiment of true poetic feeling. No notion how rapturous is the sensation'—he paused, being a little out of his depth.

'Mr. Sebright, why are you like May?' said Winnifred suddenly. 'Do you give it up?' seeing he was staggered. 'Because you begin like a whirlwind and end like a lamb. Don't try to write an epic poem. The opening lines might be as good as Milton, but I shudder to think of the bathos at the end.'

There was a pause.

'Will you be serious, Miss Forsyth, just for one second, while I ask you a question?'

'You have no right to ask me questions, and I don't mean to answer any.'

She got up and moved a little away. Some rubbish was evidently intended, and she desired to make her escape.

He put his hand out, and touched her lightly on the arm.

‘Please, please, Miss Forsyth—Winnifred’—he spoke in his most honeyed tones. ‘May I say Winnifred?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Not this once—on this solemn occasion, when I ask you to be my wife?’

‘Is that the great question you wished to put?’ She looked at him with the utmost *sangfroid*. ‘Yes? Then I withdraw my refusal to reply. You shall have an answer—if you still insist?’

‘I do insist.’ He began to be in better spirits, her coquettish manner and dancing eyes augured well for his suit. ‘I insist, unless you leave me to answer it my own way.’

‘You had better prepare yourself for the worst.’ She could not prevent his taking her hand; as he was allowed to retain it, this trifling concession raised his hopes to the highest.

‘I think I know the worst,’ he cried gaily.

‘Clever man ! what is it then ?’

‘Future captivity in exchange for present joy.’

‘What language ! if you would only compose your own songs—the words I mean—you would be as famous as you are——’

She paused in her comparison, and he gazed at her fatuously, half hoping that some compliment to his good looks would complete the phrase.

‘As —’

‘As you are fatuous.’

His face fell : but this was but the beginning of his disappointment. She drew her hand away suddenly, and said :

‘Fatuous ? I should say idiotic ! Do you really mean that you have been in earnest all this time ?’

‘Very much so : for my sins. From the first, since I met you last season at Lady Goliath’s tableaux, when you played Haydée to my Don Juan. In deep and sober earnest from the first.’

‘And I thought you were acting all along !

They said you were so good at it, and it seemed to me you were. So I took a leaf out of your own book, and acted too.'

'You meant nothing ; you don't like me ; you think me ridiculous ?'

He was so crestfallen, this hitherto omnivorous *mangeur des cœurs* was so humble in his abject misery, that Winnifred felt bound to despatch him quickly.

'I'm sorry for you, Mr. Sebright. But you have made a very great mistake, that is all. I like you—very much—as a friend, nothing more. So there must be an end of this, once and for all.'

Next day Sebright went to the Fiji Islands on a special Government mission.

The immediate effect of the Beauty's marked attentions to Winnifred had been to keep other men at a distance ; his fame was such that no one cared to enter into competition with him. After his repulse, which was soon bruited about, many held aloof ; where he had failed what hope could there be for them ? For a short term, therefore, Winni-

fred had no serious affair on hand ; the collapse of Sebright's hopes had been towards the end of the summer, just as London gaieties were coming to an end, and Winnifred with the rest of the world became wanderers upon the face of the earth. She with her stepmother migrated to Ryde, thence to Cowes, where Lord FitzHugh's yacht went for the racing, afterwards to country houses, then on to Scotland, where her father had a shooting-box and a share in a moor.

It was in these days that she struck up a great friendship with Bobby FitzHugh, whom custom called her cousin, although he was nothing of the kind : not that the friendship was anything new—she had known him as it seemed all her life, and liked him as long. He had been her champion and playmate in childish days : while she was still in short dresses, and he a newly fledged guardsman, who took notice of her. School-girls always appreciate the flattery that they are older than they look.

Bobby almost lived in his aunt's house in

town, and so had been thrown always much with Miss Forsyth. They were 'Bobby' and 'Winnifred' to each other; there was between them that nondescript, cousinly sort of affection which is never supposed to develop into anything stronger. Winnifred never intended that it should; but circumstances were too much for her.

Fate threw her continually in Bobby's way. All that autumn, yachting, shooting, visiting, wherever she went there also was Bobby. She took it quite as a matter of course; greeted him gladly, as a near relative, treated him quite as an old and confidential friend. It was so pleasant, she said, to be on such intimate terms with a man without the danger of misconstruction. She and Bobby quite understood each other, they were like brother and sister. He was not of the silly love-making sort, but a sensible matter-of-fact young man, who looked on her only as a 'pal.'

But to patronise Bobby FitzHugh as she did—to pat him, metaphorically, upon the

back, to show a preference for his society upon all occasions, to make him realise her perfections, and yet to forbid him to hope; was as futile as to put a pat of butter to harden before a blazing fire. He was an honest, kindly soul, not over-burdened with brains, who had got through his army examinations only by the skin of his teeth, as the saying is, but a loyal, warm-hearted young fellow, worshipping Winnifred not less for her looks than for the wisdom she possessed, and of which he was so lacking himself.

For a space of several months he endured agonies. Alive to Winnifred's capricious conduct in previous affairs he hardly dared to make a declaration, dreading lest it might incontinently banish him for ever from her side. So he bore his pain with a smiling face, alternating between absolute dejection and the most ambitious dreams, but satisfied for the present that he might see Winnifred constantly, and have her all to himself. The family was back in Brook Street, Bobby was doing duty in London, and throughout that

early winter season he was fairly happy, knowing no sorrows except when Winnifred flouted him, or the exigencies of his military service called him away from her side to mount guard at the Tilt, or escort a Royal personage from one palace to another.

Only when Easter was past, and the season burst into full bloom, his miseries began to grow like the spring leaves. The days of his monopoly were over ; he felt that he must speak, at all risks. He could not endure to be dwarfed back into the crowd, to be a mere unit in the long array of admirers who once more hemmed Winnifred in. So he played for the highest stake. He could hardly suffer more than at present, even though he lost all.

But it was long before he could muster up courage to face his fate. Not even when in full war paint, in glittering cuirass and shiny boots, did he dare to speak. His anxieties of mind told at length upon his outward man. His bright fresh-coloured face lost its habitual chubbiness, and daily

grew longer and more lugubrious to look upon.

Seeing this, Winnifred in all innocence became kindly solicitous. What was the matter with him? He had been gambling, betting, had fallen into some scrape. Why not make a clean breast of it to her? Confession of sorrows took out half their sting.

Bobby shook his head; and but for his profession and the Spartan courage it required him to show, would have wept then and there. His piteous woebegone appearance made Winnifred laugh.

‘Come, be a man; you’re big enough. What have they been doing to you? I’ll take your part. Who is it?’

‘Please don’t laugh at me, I can’t bear it—not from you.’

‘Well, then, go on. Tell me the whole story. Perhaps you have fallen in love. Is that it?’ she added sharply, seeing that he blushed crimson. ‘Oh, Bobby, I did not think it of you, without so much as asking

my advice. Who is she? I insist upon knowing at once.'

' You know well enough.'

Winnifred vigorously negatived the statement.

' Not Jane Haughton ; she's quite heartless. Nor Christina Villebois ; she's fair, and that's not your colour. Nor Maud Mainwaring—you told me yourself you thought her forward. No,' Winnifred said quite calmly, ' I give it up.'

' I do care for some one—more than I can put into words. I've known her ever since she was a child. She, she—'

' Now, Bobby,' interposed Winnifred with some energy. ' I do believe you mean to be foolish. Don't go on ; please, don't.'

' I can't help myself,' the gallant captain exclaimed, the tears starting to his eyes. ' I must say what I've got to say, no matter how you take it.' He might have been giving the word to charge an enemy's squadrons.

' But really, Bobby, it will be such a

pity. We've been such good friends always, haven't we ?'

'Yes, always,' sniffed the soldier.

'Since we were about *so* high. When you used to bring me the sugar plums I liked best at school, and I always gave you in return a \_\_\_\_.'

She stopped. It was better not to refer exactly to the form her gratitude took.

'Yes, I remember, a kiss.' Bobby's soft heart trembled with delight at the allusion. 'You said, too, that you liked me better than anybody else in the whole world.'

'So I did then; so perhaps I do still.'

'You do, really? Then you won't send me away? You will give me just one scrap of hope? I can wait, ever so long. But don't deny me altogether. Don't send me away, Winnifred.'

'I must if you persist in this. Listen to me; I am going to speak in sober seriousness. Had I imagined it would have come to this, nothing would have induced me to make friends with you at all. I wouldn't

give you pain—not for worlds. But I must speak the truth. I cannot be your wife ; it's quite impossible.'

'No, no ; not that.'

'Yes, impossible. I could no more marry you than I could marry my own brother—if I had one. I like you—ever so much—but not in the way you wish. You must take what I say as final. Nothing can alter me in this. I mean it, really.'

Bobby could not reply. He seemed completely crushed. Then with a sudden effort he pulled himself together, and saying mechanically, 'Good-bye, Winnifred,' left the house.

• • • •

That evening, after their return from the opera, Lady Clementina came to Winnifred's room holding a letter in her hand.

'Can you explain this unintelligible mystery ? Bobby tells me he has accepted an appointment on the staff of Sir Hector Haveitout, who goes to India as the new

commander-in-chief. Bobby starts in the autumn at latest. What does it mean ?'

Winnifred rather hung her head. She was not at all proud of her day's work.

' It is your doing then ? I guessed as much. Upon my word you are worse than I supposed. But you might have spared Bobby. When did he speak to you—to-day ?'

Winnifred nodded.

' And you refused him ? He is the third. It's—it's—quite too disgraceful of you. This is the worst case of all. The others were bad enough, but as for poor Bobby—it's scandalous, really.'

Winnifred let her ladyship have all the talking to herself. There were no excuses ready to be spoken. The girl felt at the moment full of contrition herself.

' I don't know what your father will say. He has been gravely concerned for some time past, and you may expect that he will censure you—as you deserve—upon this last proof of your wicked heartlessness. I shall

appeal to him. You do not mind what *I* say.'

'Oh, very well, very well,' cried Winnifred peevishly; 'the sooner the better, only leave me alone now.'

Many minutes more of such fault-finding would have exasperated her beyond endurance.

It must be confessed that at the end of this season life seemed to Winnifred a little flat, stale, and unprofitable. She began to be very much dissatisfied with herself, with people, and things in general. Was this dancing and gadding about to continue for ever? Was it really the sole aim and object of existence to race madly from Row to rout, to be seen on the grand tier, at Hurlingham, at Marlborough House, and the garden parties at Kew? What a hollow sham the whole thing was, from beginning to end!

This year there seized her for the first time a strange hunger for rest, a deep longing for better things, an acute feeling of regret at many lost and misspent hours, a keen

desire to raise herself out of the slough of society, and to lead a more useful, and therefore a happier life.

While these sensations gripped her tightly a proposal to accompany Lady Clementina in a lengthened cruise on board Lord Fitz-Hugh's yacht came to her as a distinct relief. For a time she would be practically alone ; other guests there would be on the yacht, but mostly ciphers so far as Winnifred was concerned. For a time she would escape the social treadmill to which she had so long been bound.

Out upon the wide waters, visiting new scenes under another and a brighter sky, life would present itself in a different aspect, and would be rendered the more enjoyable by the host of fresh sensations and the delight of continual change.

## CHAPTER II.

LORD FITZHUGH's yacht lay at Venice in the Lagoon, almost abreast of Danieli's Hotel, but nearer San Giorgio, and away from the fleet of gondolas and market-boats that crowd round the stairs in front of the Bridge of Sighs.

The season was the early autumn, the time evening. A mild, balmy evening, soft and tender as first love or the memory of a mother's lullaby ; the light glowing and iridescent from a sky tinged by the bright rays of the setting sun ; streaks of rosy, feathery clouds stretched from the west, half across the zenith ; from them the surface of the wide waters, gently heaving like rippling oil, took a thousand reflections, opalescent, rainbow-hued. One or two flashes of sunlight lingered to touch with flame each point

and pinnacle, till the marvellous outline of this fairy-like floating Venetian architecture seemed encrusted with rare jewels and adorned with glittering gold. The air was still ; the *bragozzi* under full sail crept up, wing and wing, to their moorings like quiet white-robed ghosts ; no sound was abroad to break the charmed silence of this lovely landscape, but the plashing oar of a passing gondolier, or the distant hum of voices on the Riva dei Schiavoni, or in the square beyond.

On the deck of the 'Zorayda' sat a lady sketching. This was Lady Clementina Forsyth.

Had success in that difficult branch of art called water-colour painting depended merely upon apparatus, Lady Clementina might reasonably have expected considerable renown. She was worth a small fortune to the artists' colourmen. She could talk learnedly by the hour of the various materials and appliances in vogue. She knew all about processes, and papers, and pigments.

‘Oh ! *have* you tried deep gingerine, or pale aluminium blue ?’ she would enquire of a fellow-dabbler. ‘They give you a range of tones quite new and inimitable.’

Or,

‘Why don’t you get some of the new East India tea-leaf paper ? You’ve no idea how well colour flows upon it.’

Or again,

‘My sketching easel I got from Paris, direct. It’s the handiest and most convenient thing I ever had in my life’—and so on.

Yet it must be confessed that, in spite of all this mechanical encouragement, the products of her pencil were decidedly commonplace. She lacked the true artistic faculty. A critic who wished to be ill-natured could have told her that her sense of colour was perverted, that she had no perception of real accuracy of form ; friends less honestly outspoken advised her to concentrate herself more ; to be more patient, more humble, to think more, and execute less. Such language was quite thrown away upon her. She had

learnt from a free-handed 'slap-dash' master, and she yearned to be 'slap-dash,' and 'lay down the colour' too, half hoping that by throwing it about wildly as he did, the same order would eventually be evolved from the chaos of damp blottiness in which his drawings were always begun. So far she had not got beyond the chaos.

Yet really she deserved to succeed. She was indefatigable, and for difficulty had the most superb disdain. It was amusing to observe her promptitude in attacking subjects which might have made Poussin pause, or Turner grow pale ; to see her rushing madly into intricate architectural details, her vain efforts to secure fleeting effects ; to paint in half a minute the brilliant skies and sunlit landscapes, which changed in character before she got their outline down.

Just now she had attempted a wide panoramic view, which took in San Giorgio, the Dogana, the Church of the Salute, and part of the Grand Canal. It was impossible to say which was the reddest—the sky, or the

tall Campanile. She had got the sculptures that crown the Salute into terrible confusion, and the surface of the Grand Canal was no more like water than the bed of the Red Sea, when the Israelites marched across.

Happily she was unconscious of failure, but pursued her task eagerly, quite absorbed, pausing only now and again to look at her drawing critically, with head on one side, or turning for an instant to comfort her pet pug-dog by striking his head with her brush. At times she was torn by conflicting emotions, which did she love best, her Fido or her art? Just now art had the best of it, and Fido, neglected and jealous, sulked and waddled away from her feet.

Not a very wise woman was Lady Clementina; not ill-tempered perhaps, but fussy, tetchy, and with rather too good an opinion of herself. In appearance, above the middle height, with a figure well preserved; a face which showed breeding, but which had never been handsome, a family nose, rather high cheekbones, and prominent teeth. These last

were large, white, and good, but you saw too much of them too often. She was a 'teeth-y' woman ; when she was displeased she showed them, but so she did also when she wreathed her lips into a smile.

Most honeyed was her aspect to another lady who came and joined her on deck. Mrs. Burmester was entitled to be well received. She came prepared at all costs to praise.

'Dear Lady Clementina, it's quite too lovely ; oh ! *how* do you do it ?'

Mrs. Burmester was of the interjectional emphasising sort, who use italics as freely in speech as in correspondence.

'I cannot tell you how I envy you your charming talent. I would give worlds, whole *worlds*, to paint like that. The resource it must be to you, the relief, the reward !'

Lady Clementina always considered Mrs. Burmester a most intelligent and discriminating person.

'You really think I have succeeded ?' she asked affectedly, as she rolled her head

from side to side to see which way her drawing looked best.

‘Oh, *yes*! This is quite the most charming thing you have ever done. I like that shade of crimson.’ She talked of it as though she were matching Berlin wools. ‘That pure scarlet in the sky. You’ve added that since the morning, have you not?’

‘Yes, since sunset.’

Lady Clementina had begun her drawing in the morning with a grey, cloudy sky; it made no difference to her whatever that now in the evening the whole effect—light, shade, and colour—was altogether changed.

‘You might sell these, I should think—’

‘If I chose,’ interposed Lady Clementina, whose soul revolted from such mercenary thoughts.

‘I meant that, of course,’ Mrs. Burmester hastened to add; ‘a friend of mine sold a drawing of hers in the Dudley last year for ever so many pounds. It was quite nice. She did not want the money, you

know, but still, money is useful. Have you sent often to exhibitions ?'

' Often ! ' Lady Clementina replied shortly and in sad tones.

She was always sending to exhibitions. Her footman took them upstairs while she waited below in her brougham ; and she might have taken them away at the same time, for never by any chance were they accepted and hung.

' Dear Winnifred is at work too, I suppose ? '

' It's not likely ; she's so indifferent, so idle.'

' She has not your charming talent, Lady Clementina ; she is less gifted, and therefore less engrossed.'

' Oh, but Winnifred has a very nice feeling for art,' went on Lady Clementina, in a patronising fashion. Her platform was lofty, but she came down sometimes to talk to those grovelling on the ground below.

' I have not seen the dear girl all the day.'

' She went off after breakfast in her own gondola with her maid. To explore, she said ;

most likely to idle and doze away her time, while that poor woman Mrs. Eggleton read to her. But the evening is closing in; I have asked her not to stay out after sunset. I wonder whether for once she will show any attention to my wishes.'

As Lady Clementina was speaking, a clear, sweet, girlish voice, musical, yet full and strong, hailed the yacht from under the bows—

“Zoray-da!” ahoy!

Next minute Winnifred might have been seen like a queen leaving her state-barge, while honest Pietro, chivalrous and courteous as an old Venetian noble, doffed his wide-brimmed hat, and kissed his liege lady's hand.

‘Here I am, Lady Clementina,’ Winnifred cried in that offhand manner in which she usually addressed her father's second wife. There was an armed neutrality just then between them. Her ladyship had not yet forgotten last season and her nephew's wrongs. Winnifred still resented her stepmother's interference.

‘At it still, Lady Clementina? How many tubes of cobalt to-day? You *have* laid it on thick in the shadows.’

‘How do you like it?’ asked her ladyship a little nervously.

‘H—m; if you ask me, I can’t say honestly that I think much of it. I can’t make it quite out. Turn it upside down. It won’t matter: the sea would do just as well for the sky, and the architecture would quite stand on its head. The reflections, too, are stronger than the buildings; and that boat is out of drawing. Is that a man in it? He looks like a fish.’

‘Thank you; that will do. I was foolish to ask your opinion.’

‘Take Mrs. Burmester’s then. What do you think of it?’

Mrs. Burmester was a little confused. She liked to be on good terms with everyone, and she could neither praise nor find fault without offending one or the other. But she decided to throw in her lot with Lady Clementina.

‘I think it’s delightful.’

‘Particularly the Salute,’ went on Winnifred, ‘which looks like an elephant.’

‘You are really very rude, Winnifred. But there, you always deprecate my work.’

Lady Clementina had caught up many of the terms used in the world of art, and when anyone enquired if she knew the pictures of this man or that, she would reply superbly that she knew their ‘work ;’ calling it good, conventional, thoughtful, insolent, and so forth ; not according to her judgment, for she had none, but just as she had heard it described by others.

‘By your works you will be judged ; and if these be your best, why, I’m sorry for you.’

Lady Clementina showed her teeth, and might have snarled ; but Mrs. Burmester, to fill the gap, asked Winnifred how she had spent her day.

‘Wandering about. In and out among the back canals.’

‘Winnifred,’ said Lady Clementina impressively. ‘It was most imprudent of you.

I have often warned you of the danger of malarious fever from the odours and exhalations in the small canals.'

'I know; but I wanted to see something of the place.'

'And yet you have seen none of the real sights. You've never been to the Ducal Palace, nor to San Giovanni e Pablo, nor to the Frari. I don't believe you know where the Fondaco dei Turchi is, nor who was the architect of San Mark's.'

'I'm not the only person in the dark about that. But sight-seeing bores me, I confess. I like the sights to come and see me. Perhaps I know more of Venice, of its inner life, than you do. I've been to-day to Pietro's house, where I was introduced to his wife and his seventeen children. And that reminds me—one of them is ill.'

'Nothing infectious, I hope?'

'Typhus, I believe.'

'And you dare to run such risks! Suppose you have taken the infection—suppose we are all taken ill?'

‘Don’t be alarmed,’ said Winnifred, with much composure. ‘You have every confidence surely in Dr. Burmester?’

‘Is this really true? Or are you sacrificing everything to your absurd love of effect?’

‘I know the child’s very bad—likely to die. But there, don’t get vexed. It’s brain fever, not typhus. Poor little mite! It’s the third Pietro has lost the same way. I promised to send him some wine and things. I wonder where Jarvice is? Is his lordship on board?’

‘My brother went with Mr. Grylls to see if the Portlochs had arrived by the evening train. They are due soon, as you know.’

‘After which the yawl “Zorayda,” with the Right Honourable the Earl of FitzHugh and suite—that’s Jarvice—will proceed to Albania for the winter’s shooting. *Bon!* I’m only glad I’m not going too. I’ve had enough of this.’

‘Of Venice? I thought you were devoted to the place.’

‘Of Venice I could never tire. Of being afloat I mean.’

‘Do you want to go back to England?’

‘Most certainly. Don’t you? Your materials must be running out, and it would be such a comfort to have Winsor and Newton handy. I begin to long, myself, to be back in Brook Street.’

‘Last July you said you hated London; that you never wanted to see the place again.’

‘That’s quite true. I was sick of it, and of all the humbug about. Now I’m sick of the yacht.’

‘Civil to all on board.’

Winnifred tossed her head, and went off to the cabin, disdaining to apologise. No one on board was worth it, from the noble owner to the steward’s boy. These honest people, who had been her shipmates for so long, did not particularly interest her. Long voyages are a little trying to reputations, friendships, tempers. Three months on board the ‘Zorayda’ had not developed a strong

liking for the society in which she was thrown. On the contrary, Lady Clementina's silliness certainly did not decrease; it was very doubtful whether Dr. Burmester was an idiot or a prig, or both. Mrs. Burmester was plainly a toady, neither more nor less, who took the colour of her moods from those around her, and who laughed or cried in chorus. Mr. Grylls, a private and intimate friend of his lordship, suffered from a species of halting, long-winded garrulity that was nearly maddening; as for Lord Fitz-Hugh himself, he was a middle-aged peer, pedantic, self-opinionated, pluming himself upon his erudition, and without many ideas, who, as he unbent within the small circle of friends, had risen from the positive to the very superlative of dulness and pretension.

‘Anything fresh?’ she asked abruptly, addressing the whole table when they had assembled for dinner. ‘Not one scrap of news?’ she continued, seeing that no one answered, whether from absolute dearth of subjects, or because each one was afraid to

begin. ‘Come, Mr. Grylls, tell me something fresh ; I’m pining for some news. But not about Queen Anne ; nor about the sailing of the Chioggia boat ; nor that they make glass at Murano ; nor that the Campanile’s hundreds of feet high.’

‘You are too hard upon me, Miss Forsyth. You are, I give you my word,’ said Mr. Grylls. He was a little man, with a beaky face, and a short white beard cut to a point. He talked small, too, as if his lips were a mincing machine, and it was necessary that his words should be chopped up fine for their due assimilation by his hearers.

‘You are a-ware, I pre-sume,’ said Lord FitzHugh slowly, and gravely beaming first at Winnifred through his gold-rimmed spectacles, then around the table—‘you are aware, I presume——’

A long pause, and again he looked round as if no one could possibly be aware what he was going to say.

‘Please, Lord FitzHugh, be quick ; this suspense is awful,’ cried Winnifred.

‘ You are aware, I presume, that—this—has been a beau-tiful day.’

At which Mrs. Burmester burst into a decorous laugh, thinking his lordship had intended to make a joke. But as no one joined in her merriment she suddenly looked preternaturally grave, and by way of penance bit her lips.

‘ A most remarkable day,’ said Lady Clementina, ready to die for the opinions of the head of the house of FitzHugh.

‘ Have the Portlochs arrived?’ asked Winnifred. Their coming would be the signal for her release from this region of commonplace.

‘ No,’ said Mr. Grylls, ‘ and I give you my word that we waited one hour—one whole hour—at the station ; and I assure you—yes, I assure you—during the whole time, there was a beggar—positively a beggar—annoying us, really, in the most uncomfortable—ahem—and pertinacious—ahem—fashion.’

Print can give no adequate idea of Mr.

Grylls's manner of talking. It took him many minutes to make the last speech, because from the first he seemed doubtful how to express himself. When he got as far as 'I give you my word' he had several emendations to put forward as worthy of trial before he came to the real gist of his remark, such as 'that is, I mean to say,' 'of course—ahem—you quite understand,' or 'I give it you for what it's worth, only don't quote me'—till it seemed as if one lifetime would not have sufficed to get him comfortably through a dinner grace thus embroidered, or a short version of the Lord's prayer.

But in the interval Dr. Burmester's brain had quickened and bore fruit.

'There can be no question,' he observed oracularly—the meanest utterances of tall men with such tall foreheads, such sunken eyeballs, and such ragged hair burnt up as it might be by the volcanic thoughts within, carry weight like the oracles of old—'there can be no question that a city dependent

upon rain for its water supply is peculiarly liable to zymotic disease.'

There was nothing upon the surface to connect this sage remark with any part of the previous conversation ; but had anyone been permitted to trace the processes of Dr. Burmester's mind, they would have realised that when Lord FitzHugh had said the day was fine Dr. Burmester remembered that the day previous had also been fine, and the day before that, and so on back for several months ; equally probably the next day would be fine, with every prospect of a continuance of fine weather for months to come. What must be the inevitable consequence ? Why, a change ; and a change would bring rain, and rain would fill the tanks of Venice —to the whole arrangement of which he had recently been devoting his attention.

' Zymotic disease—yes ? ' remarked Lady Clementina, as if repeating a cue. ' How deeply interesting ! and what follows therefrom ? '

' An increased death-rate, and general

degeneracy of race. You will find here that illness is very prevalent, the children weakly, difficult to rear——'

‘Quite so,’ broke in Winnifred; ‘Pietro, my gondolier, has lost three, and now a fourth is at death’s door. I went to see it to-day.’

‘My dear young lady, did you—ahem—I mean, had you the courage, that is—ahem—was it not a little imprudent——’ cried Mr. Grylls, trembling in spite of himself. Such old beaux are a little nervous on the subject of contagious disease.

‘I’m going again to-morrow, Mr. Grylls, and I want you to come too.’

‘I think really that—I’m not quite sure, you know—I give you my word, I should be sorry to appear ungallant, but I am a little susceptible, perhaps——’

‘Not so young as you were,’ Lord Fitz-Hugh said by way of encouragement.

‘You need not be in the least alarmed. It’s not a thing you would be likely to catch. It’s brain fever.’

‘That’s not infectious, of course,’ remarked Dr. Burmester with authority.

‘You might come too, then?’ Winnifred said directly to the doctor.

‘Ha! ha! had you both there,’ Lord FitzHugh shouted with delight. Most of the company laughed also, more from sympathy than because they knew why. ‘No brains, don’t you see? They can’t be attacked in what they haven’t got.’

‘I really consider you should be more circumspect, Winnifred,’ said Lady Clementina, and Winnifred braced herself up as does a man when he expects a blow and doubts where he will get it. ‘I mean that it’s quite wrong for you to go about a strange town like this all by yourself.’

‘I don’t go by myself. There’s Eggleton.’

‘Oh, she’s nobody.’

‘You’d better tell her so. I should not dare.’

‘Something might happen in these poverty-stricken dens.’

‘I thought you approved of district visiting.’

‘In London, yes, or at one’s own place in the country. But in Venice, where you are hardly known——’

‘It’s very important of course that one’s good works should be witnessed by our friends. Secret charity is a waste of effort. Here, I’m afraid, virtue must be its own reward.’

‘You will misunderstand me, Winnifred. Suppose anyone was rude to you, suppose you were robbed, suppose you were——’

‘Murdered? It’s hardly likely. They’re good inoffensive people, these Venetians.’

‘Then there is the danger of your running up against people in the streets.’

‘Not a very serious danger that. Seeing that no one walks in the streets much, and in the canals the gondoliers take very good care to avoid collisions.’

‘No; but you might come across English friends who could not fail to remark that you went about unattended and alone.’

‘Quite safe in that respect, I think. No one—at least, no one worth mentioning, only

a few artists and such like, as Mrs. Eggleton calls them—comes to Italy at this time of the year.'

'Italy is best in the spring,' said Lord FitzHugh, wondering at the moment why he had come in the autumn. Then remembering, he added, 'But it's not everyone who can leave England in the spring.'

He was thinking of his parliamentary duties, and of the important aid he had given to legislation in the last session.

'To be sure, it would be very terrible—I give you my word, quite unpleasant, to be far from Pall Mall in May.'

'And the pictures!' cried Lady Clementina, looking up at the cabin skylight as though it were a masterpiece by one of the R.A's.

'Aren't they lovely,' echoed Mrs. Burmester. 'Do you ever buy, Lord FitzHugh?'

'A little,' replied his lordship. 'But things are so dear—gone up so.'

He talked of pictures as he might of the quartern loaf.

‘There was your portrait by—I forgot whom.’

‘And that fruit thing by what’s his name, and the little landscape, and the sea piece, and—’

‘I should like to have Titian’s “Presentation in the Temple,” or the “Convite en Casa” of Paul Veronese, or Tintoretto’s “Paradise.” What giants they were, those old Venetian swells,’ said Winnifred decisively. It seemed to her like sacrilege to be talking about the puny efforts of modern art, here where the very atmosphere was impregnated with the splendid triumphs of the Venetian school.

‘Pray when did you go to the Doge’s palace, or to the Academia?’ asked Lady Clementina. Winnifred had distinctly refused to make one of the party to ‘do’ these sights.

‘To-day, yesterday, and the day before. A dozen times, in fact. Eggleton has by this time a very sound and comprehensive knowledge of Venetian art.’

‘You would not go with us.’

‘I hate to be personally conducted round sights.’

‘We once went on a personally conducted tour somewhere, did we not, Selina?’ asked Dr. Burmester, ‘I forget exactly where.’

‘To Copenhagen. It was delicious—such a sense of freedom from responsibility, no taking of tickets, no bills to pay, and we saw all the right things.’

‘They must be delightful, these personally conducted tours,’ said Winnifred. ‘A gang came into St. Mark’s to-day while I was sketching there. Intense joy sat upon every face. One old man only looked sad; he had just returned from a child’s funeral—at least, so I concluded, for he had on a tall black hat, and round it was a long white “puggaree” like a hat-band.’

‘But the conductor is always an agreeable person,’ protested Mrs. Burmester.

‘They are of the class the gods love; they die young. The man to-day looked in a galloping decline. If I had an enemy I

should wish him to adopt personal conducting as a profession. It would wear a stone. Fancy keeping the peace in such a crowd.'

'What were they like, these tourists? To what rank in life did they presumably belong?' asked Lord FitzHugh.

'Buttermen mostly, I expect, and their wives, who would be far happier at Margate than abroad, who prefer coloured photographs to pictures, and think the Basilica not to be compared with the Hall by the Sea. But one of them to-day had some taste. He came and admired my sketch.'

'Can you mean that he had the effrontery to speak to you?' cried Lady Clementina aghast.

'He had, indeed. More than that, he took out his purse and offered to buy the drawing then and there.'

'That is what I complain of,' went on her ladyship; 'going about alone exposes you to insult.'

'I considered it a compliment, and I told him so, and took the money.'

‘Winnifred, Winnifred, this is quite disgraceful.’

‘And how much did you clear by the transaction?’ asked Lord FitzHugh, highly amused.

‘Five pounds.’

‘Cheap, too, I give you my word, for one of those really extraordinarily clever little things of yours.’

‘You surely did not take the money from him?’

‘Well, not exactly. But I made him put it into the poor box, and he was quite satisfied. He gave me his address too—Mr. Skeggs, Beeswax Lodge, Pedlar’s Green, and hoped I’d call some day, and see the sketch upon his walls. I shall go, too.’

‘Gracious goodness, Winnifred, you nearly deprive me of speech. What will you do next?’

What Winnifred was meditating next would have surprised Lady Clementina a good deal more.

## CHAPTER III.

MISS WINNIFRED FORSYTH had become a little dissatisfied with the methods of locomotion available in Venice. To her active spirit the luxuriously cushioned ease of the gliding gondola—Lothair's hansom of the Adriatic—was somewhat monotonous and tame. She panted for exercise more vigorous—a good stirring walk, for instance ; but of this there was no hope. Here were neither green lanes nor broad turnpike roads : only tortuous *calles*, always thronged and difficult to thread. Or a brisk gallop across country, but this, too, was forbidden. Rumour said that there was but one horse in the whole of Venice, and he was retained partly to drag the garden roller in the Giardini Publichi, partly as a rare specimen of wild beast, to be cherished as we

cherish the rhinoceros or the banded armadillo at the Zoo.

Then Winnifred sought to seduce her gondolier, Pietro, into surrendering to her his place at the oar. But a very short trial convinced her that the game was dangerous, and quite beyond her skill.

While thus in doubt chance took her one day by a boat-builder's yard near the Fondamenta Zattere, and here she saw a small canoe, such as she had often used upon the quiet waters of the fish ponds of Burcham Paddox, Lord FitzHugh's place. How delightful to try a little boating at Venice all on her own account! She made a confidant forthwith of Pietro, and commissioned him at all costs to secure the canoe.

Pietro was aghast. In the mongrel German which he had picked up as an Austrian soldier, and in which he and Winnifred conversed, he besought the good signorina to forbear. She would risk her precious life—she might be drowned. It was madness for anyone to navigate the intricate water

thoroughfares of Venice, except those to the manner born. She might see for herself any day, collisions, accidents, shipwrecks were only avoided by the consummate skill of the gondoliers. It took years to learn their cries of warning; boatmen who were ignorant or careless came under the ban of the law.

Winnifred put this last objection easily aside. She declared that she could learn to say, 'ohé,' 'premi,' 'ahi esta,' with the best, and far more musically. But that would be unnecessary. She would keep clear of the labyrinths within the city, and range the wide open lagoons, where there was ample sea room, and she could not come to harm. 'No harm,' cried Pietro, 'why here were currents strong and wayward, quicksands shifting with the tide, sudden, swift, raging storms churning in half a moment the quiet waters into angry, white-crested waves.'

Pietro knew but little of the temper of his patroness. When she was resolved it was mere waste of words to protest. Neither the

preachings of her gondolier's experience, nor poor Eggleton's piteous appeal to be excused from accompanying Winnifred in her first perilous voyage availed. Very early on the morning after the conversation given in the last chapter, she was conveyed in her own gondola to where the canoe lay ready to receive her.

This enterprise was a profound secret to all but the three parties concerned, Winnifred, Pietro, and the lady's-maid. Not that Lady Clementina's opposition would have mattered much ; but as Winnifred herself put it, 'What was the good of a row ?' Eggleton was sworn over ; her dislike to the whole affair was silenced when Winnifred relieved her from the obligation of becoming also a passenger in the frail craft. Pietro satisfied his conscience by assuring himself that he would follow close at hand in order to give assistance at the first suspicion of alarm.

' Oh, mem, do be careful,' said Mrs. Eggleton, almost crying. The prim, precise old woman loved Winnifred dearly ; she had

been maid to Winnifred's mother, and at her mistress's death had made the little orphan her especial charge, coaxing, correcting by turns, and ending by becoming, as we find her, Winnifred's most abject and devoted slave.

'Oh, mem, do mind,' she cried, as Winnifred took her seat in the little cockleshell of a craft, which swayed about dangerously, even with her light weight—'you ain't a-going far, I do hope and trust ?'

'Only to Lido, or to Chioggia—eighteen miles, more or less.'

'Eighteen miles ! It's mere suicideous. Oh, mem, suppose, suppose—'

'Suppose you were to come, too ? Because that's how it will end, if you talk so much about it. As it is, I think I shall require you just to keep the stern steady.'

'No, mem ; please no.'

'Then be quiet ; let me have no more of this whining.'

And with that she paddled gaily away.

The canoe was light as a feather, handy,

and easily turned. Under Winnifred's strong skilful stroke it made such rapid progress, that Pietro was hard put to it to keep up. But he laboured hopefully on. There was as yet no difficulty. They were still in bye canals, where there was little traffic and but few obstructions.

Presently they came out by the Palazzo Dario on to the Grand Canal itself, and now Winnifred, who had felt from the first that she was under surveillance, resolved to shake off her watchful attendants.

Beckoning to Pietro, she made him go ahead. He stammered out a half unintelligible protest.

'I want to go to the Fondamenta Nuova. I don't know the way. You lead, I will follow.'

A peremptory mandate which the gondolier reluctantly obeyed.

Something in Mrs. Eggleton's over-anxious face as she passed in Pietro's boat reinforced Winnifred's wicked intention of giving them the slip. All at once, while the

man was involved in a dispute with two ponderous water barges ahead, she turned off sharply down a side canal, then turned again, and yet again, paddling hard all the while, and soon was quite beyond pursuit.

She had gained her end. Now she was on her own resources : free to come and go where she pleased. To loiter or hurry on ; to explore out-of-the-way *sotto portici* ; to pause before the rich façades of half forgotten palaces out of the beaten track. Here she came suddenly upon gay gardens, their flowers and fruit-laden trees glittering through the richly wrought iron work of old worm-eaten gates. Here she found a small secluded church, of which only the sad, patient students of Baedeker or Murray had heard ; again she caught with delighted surprise new combinations of familiar objects—the tall campanile of St. Mark's rising into the sky above one narrow canal, or a slant of the Rialto seen across the end of another.

So far it had been all plain sailing, the landmarks easily discerned. She had no

fears of losing her way. Besides, all the people she met—astonished, doubtless, at the vision of this fair English girl afloat like Noah in a boat of her own—were yet courteous and, as far as possible, obliging: making way for her, guiding her at times, at others preceding her to clear her path. Certainly for the remainder of her visit she would adopt canoeing as the most delightful style of conveyance in this most delightful place.

But by degrees she reached a quarter altogether new to her—at the northern end of the city. Her watch told her it was getting on towards breakfast time, and she began to think of returning to the yacht. Now, too, her conscience smote her sore for the trick she had played upon faithful Eggleton and the honest gondolier. They were, perhaps, still hunting for her hopelessly in among the canals, or had returned woebegone to the yacht to tell their terrible tale.

But to wish to retrace her course towards the Piazetta was one thing, it was another to accomplish her purpose. The only thing was

to choose some one route, and follow it persistently to the end. Hereabouts there were few people to direct, and she spoke so little Italian, that those whom she asked could give but little assistance. The houses were not of the highest order; the chief in sight was an old weather-beaten building, once a church or a hospital, used now as a granary or a military store; close by a sort of wharf, with timbers green and water-worn, standing some height above the water; beyond a wide area of logs, rafts of floating timbers; and beyond again a glimpse of the Lagoon, closed in the far distance by the blue mountains of Cadorre.

Just then, while she paused somewhat puzzled, and wondered how she should proceed, there fell upon her ears the 'puff-puff' of a steam launch, and then the hubbub of childish voices rising in a chorus of shrill trebles. She looked round and saw a boat-load of small children in tow behind a small tug—a crowd of poor sickly mites from the Infants' Hospital, returning from a jaunt upon

the Lagoon, and thus merry in spite of their ailments, being cheered by the fresh breeze and their rapid progress through the water. Their delight increased to shouts of joy when they espied Winnifred in her canoe. This was quite a new sight to them, and indeed to everyone on board. All craned over the side to stare; nor did Winnifred resent the attention. On the contrary, having often seen this procession before, she knew that by following the hospital boats they would lead her back to the Grand Canal.

So she turned her canoe sharply round and gave chase.

Only now, when close in the steamer's wake, did she become alive to the danger she ran from the wash of water. The launch and its consort had disappeared round a corner, but it had left behind an increasing area of small billows, and upon them in half a second Winnifred's frail bark was dancing like a cork. It seemed impossible to avoid this miniature whirlpool. She tried hard to change her course, but found that the canoe

was beyond her control. Then, to her horror, she began to drift rapidly towards the line of logs—the timber raft she had observed out at the end of the canal—and presently, in spite of her efforts, the swell dashed her against them with a shock that boded serious mischief to her ship.

Next moment, Winnifred saw her canoe was filling rapidly. She must decide all at once whether she should abandon it or go down. In obedience to the imperious instinct of self-preservation, she chose her part without hesitation, and made desperate efforts to climb out upon the timber raft.

She was unsuccessful. Every instant increased her peril, and she was now in thorough alarm. Then, at the climax of her danger, while she was still struggling half in half out of the canoe, a friendly voice came to encourage her, a friendly hand was outstretched to raise her from despair.

‘Jump! jump!’ she heard, and with yet more powerful eloquence a stalwart arm

seconded the entreaty. One last supreme effort, and she was landed in safety upon the raft.

Almost immediately afterwards the canoe sank and disappeared.

‘I am sure I am very much obliged to you,’ stammered Winnifred, her face flushing scarlet after her recent exertions, but eyes bright and glistening and grateful. ‘But for you I might have been drowned.’

‘It was a narrow squeak certainly,’ said her preserver in calm, matter-of-fact tones.

‘Do you think you can stand alone?’

He still held her hand tightly grasped. So tightly that Winnifred felt powerless, yet perfectly safe. She looked up rather shyly at this great strong man, who had given such satisfactory proof of his prowess.

A young man, tall and rather loosely put together, clad in flowing garments of coarse homespun, with wide-brimmed slouch hat shading a pair of eyes habitually sad and thoughtful in expression, but having just then a tinge of comical meaning as they were bent

upon Winnifred in grave but curious examination.

‘I think, if you will allow me,’ he said, as he handed her carefully over the loose logs, ‘it will be better for you to move a little more this way. This place is a little slippery, you will be more secure upon the other side. I am at work there.’

Winnifred followed obediently, but without a word, to a sort of platform below a high pile of timber, where she found an artist’s sketching-easel and a camp-stool. A large white umbrella was pitched like a tent, and strewed about were tubes of colour, brushes and palette, a mahl-stick, bottles, and old painting rag, and a big box of japanned tin—in short all the appliances of a painter employed at his craft.

‘May I offer you a seat?’ said the stranger, presenting the camp-stool, and doing the honours of his domain.

‘You are very good,’ replied Winnifred, ‘but really I must be going. My friends will be growing anxious——’

The stranger smiled, and Winnifred's colour rose, this time in anger. Why should he laugh at her ?

‘ I think you had better rest a little ? ’

‘ Not at all. I am not in the least fatigued. I should like to go at once.’

Again the stranger smiled.

‘ I am afraid,’ he said, at length, after a very provoking pause, during which Winnifred grew more and more enraged, ‘ that is quite impossible. You hardly realise your position. You are a prisoner.’

This was certainly the most extraordinary man. Did he consider her as his property, a sort of flotsam or jetsam, a waif from the sea, which having been washed up at his feet he meant to keep as treasure-trove ?

‘ Really, sir ! ’ she exclaimed petulantly, ‘ this is no time for jesting. You have rescued me—you have saved my life, in short, and I am grateful, truly grateful ; but you will understand that now I desire to return to my own friends. Pray do not detain me.’

‘ My dear madam ! ’ and again the stranger

smiled very good-humouredly. It was a very pleasant, taking face when he was in good humour. 'My dear madam, I, personally, have no wish to detain you—you will detain yourself.'

'Tut, tut, tut!' Winnifred cried, with increasing asperity in her tone.

'You came here of your own accord, and here for the present you *must* remain.'

'Must?' Winnifred's eyes flashed passionate indignation. She was not accustomed to such peremptory language.

'Don't you see that this raft is quite cut off from the mainland? There can be no escape from it—unless you take to the water and swim ashore.'

It was as he said. How could she have remained so blind to the fact? They were on an island—a small timber island—at some distance from any habitations, or indeed from dry land.

Was ever hair-brained girl so punished for her folly. What was to be done? Fright now succeeded anger, and in very

humble tones she asked her preserver to explain.

‘Why are you, like Robinson Crusoe, separated entirely from your fellow men? You do not live here always, do you?’

The situation might be embarrassing, but it had nevertheless its comic side.

‘No, not exactly. But I’m doing a “subject” here—the Cadorre mountains, you see,’ and he waved his hand towards them and then towards his canvas. ‘I am brought here in the morning, and in the evening my gondolier calls for me and takes me home.’

‘In the evening!’ repeated Winnifred, now quite nervous and alarmed. ‘Late? after dark?’

‘Sometimes he forgets me till ——’

‘Next day?’

‘Well, no, not often; but till five or six in the evening.’

And now it was barely eleven! Gracious goodness! was she to be condemned to this *tête-à-tête* for six mortal hours?

‘It’s very awkward,’ she said, rather pitifully, at length.

‘Very.’

The man was exasperatingly stoical and laconic. But his brief speech might be interpreted that the thing could not be helped. Why make such a fuss about it?

‘Dear me, is there nothing you can suggest?’ went on Winnifred pettishly.

This strange man took it all as a matter of course. Already, as she would not accept the camp stool, he had reseated himself, and was scrutinising his canvas with an eye to recommencing work.

‘Not much—would you like me to swim ashore and fetch you a boat?’

‘If you only would—’

He laughed heartily.

‘A very cool request indeed. But you will pardon my refusing.’

‘Then why did you suggest it? I declare, sir, you are most uncouth.’

Again he laughed.

‘I am half starved; the sun is burning;

my friends will think I am dead. Yet you sit there like a stone.'

'Pray forgive me'; and he rose, but not with alacrity. 'Only, as you wouldn't have the seat when I offered it you, and as I—— The fact is, I wanted to get on with my work. I am leaving Venice very shortly, and I much wish to finish this study first.'

He was looking lovingly at his canvas once more, evidently thinking far more of it than of the attractive young lady at his side.

Winnifred actually stamped her foot. The cool indifference of the man was most humiliating. If he had paid her the most fulsome compliments she would have been the better prepared to meet him. But to be ignored; to be treated as nobody; to be made to play second fiddle to a sketch, all this was most insulting. She felt injured, vexed, already she cordially detested this cold, impassive, unconcerned individual, in spite of all she owed him.

Then, suddenly, he looked up, and saw

upon Winnifred's face some outward signs of her chagrin—

'I am really very rude,' he said apologetically. 'You are hungry, you say, and the sun *is* hot. Luckily I have brought some lunch. Perhaps you will allow me to make you comfortable here under the shadow of the umbrella?'

With that he busied himself about, drew from a bag some sandwiches, a flaskful of old Chianti, then a melon, some grapes, and a few figs, all of which he arranged upon a clean plank. Then setting the camp stool in position, he turned to Winnifred and begged her to fall to.

'But now you won't be able to go on with your work. I have the stool, and the umbrella. What a bore it must be to you?'

'Well, it is,' he replied frankly, offending her again just when she was better disposed towards him for his civil attentions. 'However, I must get on somehow. I should be sorry to lose more time. It's a terrible waste of precious light all this.'

Another civil speech ! To save her life, to comfort her in her wretchedness, these meritorious acts which dozens of men would have executed with effusion, were with him —merely a waste of time !

But she would punish him by eating up all his lunch ; and she munched away at the sandwiches, drank some of the wine, and finished all the fruit. Then a qualm of conscience assailed her.

‘ I’m afraid I’ve left you nothing at all,’ she said, by way of making amends.

‘ Eh ?’ cried the other absently. ‘ Did you speak ?’ He had made up a rough seat of logs, and had been painting away most assiduously. He was altogether absorbed in his work. It was clear that he had long since forgotten the fact of Winnifred’s existence.

He moved, however, slightly, and said, ‘ Did you speak ?’

‘ Oh, it does not matter,’ replied Winnifred haughtily.

‘ No ; I daresay not. But it will come

all right with a glaze. It's better always to get your masses in cool, and warm them up later on.'

Certainly this was the oddest man Winnifred had ever met. He was really beginning to amuse her. She thought she might draw him out.

' You seem very devoted to your art?'

No answer.

' You are—very—devoted to your—art?'

Still not a word.

' Have you made many studies in Venice?'

His want of politeness was absolutely unbearable.

' Hush—wait.' He spoke quite angrily. Tears—of indignation—sprang to Winnifred's eyes. She declared to herself that she wouldn't speak to him again. So for quite half an hour silence reigned, and it was broken first by the stranger himself.

' Tut, tut! How very fleeting the effect is! Have you ever tried'—he said this without turning round, as though Winnifred were a comrade, a brother of the brush,

working close by him—‘have you ever tried burnt sienna and Prussian blue for Lagoon water—laid in with a full brush, and then dragged to give texture?’

Winnifred laughed outright.

‘Were you speaking to me? Are you quite sure who I am?’

The stranger started at her voice, and hurriedly looked round.

‘No; upon my honour. I thought I was speaking to Huskisson. He was here, too, yesterday. But you, you——’ ‘Who the deuce are you?’ was what he meant to say, plainly.

‘My name is Winnifred Forsyth. I am here in Venice—that is to say—for my pleasure—on this raft for my sins.’

‘Ah! of course it was a little imprudent of you, was it not, to go out alone in that cockle-shell?’

‘Not at all. I am devoted to boating.’

‘And your friends approved?’

‘I’m not in the habit of going down on my knees to beg permission to——’

‘Do foolish things? I daresay not. But

you ought not to be allowed to drown yourself. In London the police would have interfered. It was about the most insane, ill-judged proceeding I ever heard of. Any child of five would have had more sense.'

'Upon my word this man grows more and more aggravating,' thought Winnifred.

'I don't see that it is any affair of yours'—she would speak to him in his own style.

'It was as well I made it my affair, or you would be floating with the fishes now. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you first. Then when the steamer came by I went across the raft fully expecting to see you swamped—and you were.'

'If you were so convinced of my danger, why did you not warn me?'

'Did no one else warn you before you started. Did you take their advice?'

'It grieves me to think how I am disturbing you in your work. You have wasted so much time upon me already——' said Winnifred coldly, and disdaining to answer his question.

He merely waved his hand. It might be that he was resigned to his fate—at any rate he would not deny that she was interfering and distracting his attention.

‘Let me beg of you to resume painting. It is not the least necessary to make conversation for my amusement; I am not easily bored—by myself.’

‘Some people bore their friends more than they do themselves.’

‘Thank you—if *you* were a friend perhaps I should bore you?’

‘I am not easily bored, either,’ he replied, with provoking composure.

Winnifred bit her lip and looked away. The man puzzled her. He could hold his own in *repartée*; or was it merely simplicity, and want of *savoir faire*?

She looked rather ostentatiously at her watch, and then broke out with a half sigh—

‘Barely two. Is there really no prospect of escape from this desolate spot till five this evening?’

‘Sometimes a gondola passes. Not often,

though. By-and-by the fruit-boats come on their way to the market. I might hail one.'

'If you would be so good.'

'A seat upon the melons and gourds would not be half so comfortable as my camp stool.'

'But I should be released from——' your society, she thought of saying, but recovered herself in time—'from durance.'

'That is quite true,' and he gazed at her most intently.

Was he beginning to dread separation? Was he at length prepared to do homage to her charms?

Not a bit of it. Had any other man stared at her in this way, and in this situation, she would have probably blushed indignantly; but it was evident she was not even in his thoughts; that it was not herself—winsome, comely Winnifred Forsyth—that was present before him; his eyes were with his mind, wandering off after some dreamy abstraction.

'It is an excellent harmony of colour. I

have never seen the arrangement before —rich auburn at the edges, glittering against the blue ; but it could not be done with any sky but this ; the blue must be quite warm.'

He was merely taking stock of her as a 'subject,' a model whom he might paint. Certain combinations of tint in her appearance pleased his artistic eye, that was all.

However, he did not pursue the enquiry further. Winnifred lost the chance of abruptly refusing to sit to him if he had had the effrontery to ask her, for with a gesture, as if to shut out frivolities, he once more took up his palette, and gave his full attention to his work.

He painted away for quite an hour, leaving Winnifred altogether to herself.

She was restless, discontented, humiliated, vexed ; and yet it was better thus.

Then she got up and made a short survey of their little island. Was there really no loophole of escape ? She saw only her own reflection in the ripple, mocking her and bidding her abandon hope.

Back again, to find the artist still engrossed upon his canvas. Next she climbed to the top of the logs, and looked out towards Murano, over the line of cypresses of the Venetian Père Lachaise, across the tranquil mirror of the Lagoon.

There was no dearth of moving life upon the water, fishing boats flitting to and fro, but none, unhappily, within hail, none travelling in the direction of the raft.

Stay ! what is that ? a gondola ?

She seemed to recognise the blue-striped awning which she had herself presented to Pietro ; but it was too far distant to distinguish. It came nearer, and her heart throbbed high with expectation and the hope that relief was at hand. Then it turned off, as if uncertain of its course. They did not know she was in this direction—how should they ?

In a fever of excitement she rushed back to her involuntary companion, called and spoke to him eagerly, called and spoke again, and yet again.

It was not until she touched him a little roughly on the shoulder that he looked up.

‘What’s the matter?’

‘I had a notion I saw a boat coming towards us.’ Winnifred was quite excited.

‘Really? From which side?’

‘From the Fondamenta Nuova.’

‘Capital. Just in the nick of time.’

Winnifred was quite pleased at the interest he seemed to take.

‘What sort of boat is it?’ he went on.

‘What sort? Why, a gondola.’

‘A gondola! pooh! That’s no use.’

‘No use?’

‘No; not what I wanted at all.’

‘So you want a boat too?’

‘Yes’—perhaps he meant to run away from her—‘for my picture, down there on the left; don’t you see the canvas is a little “to let” there?’

‘Psha!’

Winnifred became furious at the man’s extraordinary selfishness. Then, being eager

to attract the attention of the people in the boat, she turned away from him.

‘Oh dear, dear ; I believe they don’t see me. This way ! this way !’ she cried aloud, forgetting the distance was too great for her voice to reach them. ‘They are turning off ; they are going back. Tut, tut—oh sir, sir, this is really awful ; and you don’t care one bit. It’s shameful really, disgraceful. I do think you might do something.’

He paid no attention to her entreaties, but continued to stick close to his canvas ; only, as she grew more indignant, he replied, a little absently,

‘Well, stand up on the top of the pile of wood, and wave something—your handkerchief, your hat, gown, petticoat ; anything you’ve got handy.’

‘Sir, you’re an absolute bear ; you don’t even offer to help.’

‘Well, here’s my painting-rag. Look out for the turps.’

He held the filthy thing towards her at the end of his mahl-stick.

‘Upon my word, sir, I believe——’

But what Winnifred believed never transpired, for now the people in the gondola appeared to have made out her figure as she stood upright upon the raft.

The gondola approached rapidly. Yes; it was Pietro’s, and in the stern Winnifred saw Eggleton’s white scared face.

‘Oh mem, it is a blessed relief this—I have been hunting high and low; I made sure you were a corpse long ago.’

‘What a time you have been coming; I’ve been waiting for you these two hours,’ Winnifred coolly replied. ‘Where did you go? Back to the yacht?’

‘No, mem; we didn’t dare. Not without you.’

Winnifred was not sorry to find that her escapade might still remain a secret from Lady Clementina, unless she chose to tell it her own way.

‘And the canoe, signorina?’ Pietro asked.

Winnifred pointed to the water.

‘The Holy Mother protect us!’

‘It was a mercy you were not drowned,’ said Eggleton, wiping her eyes.

‘I should have been, most assuredly, but for this gentleman.’

Now that her own people were with her, Winnifred felt at her ease, and could afford to be courteous.

‘I fear I have trespassed too long upon your good nature,’ she went on, with a superb air; ‘but, as my own boat has arrived, I shall no longer inflict my company upon you. Before I go, may I ask—you would oblige me by letting me know to whom it is that I am so much indebted?’

‘Certainly. My name is Dominic Gwynne, of London—and elsewhere.’

‘You are not, I think, a member of the Royal Academy?’

Was she chaffing him? For the first time he looked at her keenly, and with some interest.

‘I am only a beginner, young and unknown. The Academy is not for such as me—not yet awhile.’

‘You are too modest. But I thought you must be an Academician, you seemed so devoted to your art, so completely absorbed: besides, your manipulation is so excellent, your *technique* so successful——’

‘Thank you.’

Certainly she was chaffing him, and he smiled. It amused him. But Winnifred chose to consider his smile one of contempt, and she resolved to put an end to the scene.

‘Good-bye, then, Mr. Glynn.’

‘Gwynne.’

‘I beg your pardon. Perhaps you will find time to call upon my stepmother?’

‘You’re very good. In London?’

‘No; here in Venice, on Lord Fitz-Hugh’s yacht—the “Zorayda.”’

‘Thank you. I think not. My time here is short’; he was gazing at his easel again; ‘I have much to occupy me—I am very busy.’

‘Oh, it’s quite as you please. I only wished to make my stepmother thank you in person. Perhaps when you return to town

you will have more leisure. My father's house is 276 Brook Street. If you will call, they would be delighted to see you.'

The man was an uncultivated, disagreeable bear. Still, he had done her a very great service, and she was bound to show her gratitude.

Dominic bowed, but did not speak. Just then a speck of dirt appeared in the sky of his sketch, and he was anxiously seeking to remove it.

'But I daresay you are above paying visits.'

'On the contrary, it will give me great pleasure. Broad Street, I think you said? Which Broad Street; in the City, or that near Golden Square?'

'You must look in the Blue Book. Your memory is, I fear, a little treacherous. It wants freshening up.'

He had lapsed once more into contemplation of his canvas, and had only heard her last words.

'Do you think so really? I had hoped

it was freshly painted. That, indeed, seemed its only merit.'

'Dear, dear,' thought Winnifred, 'this is the oddest man I ever met;' then she said aloud,

'But this is sheer waste of time.'

And before Dominic Gwynne could put out a hand to help her she had jumped into the gondola, and bade Pietro hurry away.

Once only, when at a little distance away, she looked back to wave an adieu. It was rude to disappear without saying good-bye. She might have saved herself the trouble.

He was again bending over his easel, busier than ever. She was already altogether forgotten.

Winnifred tossed her head.

'As if it mattered! I don't suppose we shall ever meet again. I'm sure I'm not the least anxious we should.'

Yet she did not like it at all. The man's insensibility wounded her vanity. He was the first who had refused to bend his neck to the yoke, and Winnifred hated him almost for his indifference.

## CHAPTER IV.

DOMINIC GWINNE was an artist heart and soul ; devoted to his profession with that enthusiastic love which art, and pre-eminently the painter's art, inspires. Art was his mistress, claiming his first and last thought, worshipped ever without wavering.

An artist, but not all in one groove. His genius was versatile. A musician, modest and unpretending, but having a certain power over the violin ; a dramatist, having written charades and a play or two ; and something of a poet with it all, as in truth the man must be who would seek to interpret nature, whether by pen or pencil, to his fellow man. If he lacked the faculty of rhyme, he could note down his thoughts in rough prose, wherein he caught and gave meaning to fleeting fancies and passing effects, to be

perpetuated hereafter upon canvas, in that other language which only the painter has at his command—the poetry of form and the sentiment of colour.

He was one who, as he walked in broad daylight amid the sights of the world, in a measure saw visions and dreamt dreams ; one to whom the ordinary aspects of external nature, the baldest landscape facts—a heap of smirched and draggled farmyard straw, dull reaches of stagnant ditchwater, grim unlovely dens of squalor and dirt—assumed a special beauty of their own ; while the grander effects, the storm-tost shore, the mysterious gloom of a forest aisle, the smiling upland clothed in autumn gold, nature's magnificence on the broadest scale and in the bravest apparel, roused him to an enthusiasm which the thorough artist alone can know.

He was born to be a painter, his mother gleefully said, as she saw him grasp with puny fingers the nursery pencil, doing his best to reproduce with curious hierogly-

phics surrounding objects as they presented themselves to his wondering eyes. ‘He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.’ Mrs. Gwynne, after her husband’s death, lived only for her child. Their home was a modest cottage in a little Kentish village, by the margin of that noble river the Medway. Mrs. Gwynne’s scanty pension as the widow of a military officer was only just sufficient to keep the wolf from the door. The luxury of a high class education for little Dominic was forbidden her; but she made shift to teach him herself. Before she had married Major Gwynne she had conned many lessons in the quiet country vicarage which had been her early home, and acquired many accomplishments, so that from his mother the little Dominic learnt something more than mere book lore.

When together, like salmon leaping to the sea, they had jumped the first barrier of alphabet, and tided on with fuller stroke into the wide waters of pot-hook and hanger, Mrs. Gwynne led her child to drink in the

beauties of external nature, seeking to develop thus early those æsthetic aspirations which seemed a marked feature in his character. What if this mite was an embryo Sir Joshua, another Gainsborough, a Romney, or a Lawrence, destined to be as famous by-and-by as any of the great names of the English school ?

So no small part of the education the lad received as he came on in years was in the observation of effect, of the play of light and shade, the beauty of form, the glow of colours in bright contrast, the repose and harmonious rhythm of others more reserved in tone. Such lessons he loved full well. It was his chief delight to study landscape under the open canopy of heaven ; to sit hour after hour watching the clouds as they changed from form to form, enjoying their endlessly subtle variations of colour and shape, soon knowing and distinguishing the streaked cirrus, the mackerel or mare's tail, or yet again the cumuli, which looked like mountains on the move, or tremendous struc-

tures built up by heavenly giants of super-human strength and power.

And there was much in the village to gratify a taste more critical than that of this untutored although precocious child. It was in itself quaint and picturesque, full of old 'black and white' houses with hanging eaves and pointed roofs of time-embrowned tiles ; it had a square-towered Norman church standing high above all, its grey outlines sharply defined against the sky, tall trees around it, cypresses mostly, centuries old ; and when climbing the steep hill you reached 'God's acre,' you found it crammed with tombstones ancient as fossils, and bearing curious epitaphs in old English letters upon lichen-covered scrolls.

Dominic came hither sometimes, and crouched close up against the churchyard wall saw the sun go down over the flats towards the far-off city, and marked its evening glow upon the snake-like involuted windings of the river as it crept slowly onwards to the sea. He had other favourite haunts. He

could punt himself across the river to the towing path, and spend an hour or two among the big burdocks and the tall rank grasses of the sloping bank ; or he wandered on towards the granite quarry, interested in all that went on there, in the apparatus by which the great blocks were moved, listening eagerly to the ring of the 'jumpers,' and the 'chip-chip' of the chisels, stirred now and again by the excitement of a blast. Again, he rowed up river in among the long flat meadows, margined by weeds waving row behind row like lances in serried ranks of a regiment of horse, till he reached the hop-gardens, and lingered there under the shadow of the luxurious plant with its wealth of twining tendrils and delicate sprays. Then, the barges were for ever going up and down with the tide, or above the lock were towed by patient horses to their berths beside the homesteads. It was a sight to see their masts and spars in among the trees ; to note the highly-coloured sails and the gaily decorated hulls against the background of wood-

land ; the sails tan-dried, and dyed a rich crimson or madder-brown, patched at hazard with cadmium, yellow ochre, or blue ; the hulls, bright as rainbow-hued peacocks, having tillers of emerald green, or vandyke red, yellow, or white and ultramarine. Often from a barge as it passed a wisp of light blue smoke curled up from the fire below the stewpan in the open grate ; the bargee's bride stood by in a spotted frock with a baby in her arms ; the skipper at the stern sat upon the tiller and smoked ; a dog surveyed the landscape from the roof of the little deck-house, and barked when the view displeased him, or he thought he saw an enemy.

Dominic was easily contented, and the days ran by happily enough, till he came to be old enough to make a start in life. The bias of his mind was bent now more than ever towards art ; in it, and it alone, could he hope to find his vocation. So, when he was barely sixteen, they moved up to London, the great centre of all things, and established themselves in a quiet and remote

suburb called Pedlar's Green. Thence, daily, Dominic trudged into town, to sit at the feet of Swanwick, and pick up all he could in that well-known teacher's studio-school. Here, too, at home, under his mother's appreciative eye, he worked every hour of his leisure—worked not only to improve himself, but to earn bread; for it was his ambition to win with the least possible delay a sufficient competence to comfort his mother's declining years.

A very manful fight the young fellow made. Bearing himself bravely against disappointment, want of recognition, petty jealousies from less gifted fellows, positive injuries and crying wrongs from the birds of prey who batten upon youthful talent, and despoil it of its first fruits. A spirit less hopeful would have had all the poetic freshness of his youth crushed out of him.

To wander wearily, day after day, from this shop to that, with his portfolio, submitting his drawings, perfected, one and all, with that elaboration and minuteness of finish

which from the first was the most marked characteristic of his work, to the careless inspection of disdainful, crassly ignorant dealers ; to wait interminable hours in grimy editorial antechambers, waiting, waiting, from morning till night, gaining, perhaps, at the eleventh one second's glimpse of the Jove-like autocrat who only condescended to embody his contemptuous rejection in intelligible words ; to be bullied by wood engravers, jockeyed by art publishers, beaten down in price by the dealers, refused admission to the Academy schools—these trials epitomise the whole of the incidents in that early battle for existence, which he fought, notwithstanding, bravely enough to compel eventual success.

It came slowly and surely ; already he had his foot in the stirrup, and was preparing to mount his Pegasus, when, almost without warning, his mother died. She had pined in London, although only its outskirts, and missed the free, open air of the country in which she had been born and bred. Do-

minic was too fully occupied in the busy struggle to notice the change that was coming over her ; and then, suddenly, she died.

For a time he was inconsolable. He had neither heart nor spirit for his work. His fight had been for his mother's sake ; he had sought to win fame chiefly that she might rejoice in it ; to earn a substantial income only that she might be relieved from the pressure of want.

In this mood he remained till starvation stared him in the face. This roused him, sharply enough ; and as from a dream he awoke to return with all the energy he could muster to the pursuit of his beloved art. It was about this time that the ' Picturesque News ' started into life, an illustrated paper which aimed at popularising the highest class of the wood draughtsman's skill. Dominic was offered work upon it. Although checked somewhat by over-fastidiousness and dissatisfaction at his own efforts, Dominic wielded a ready pencil, and could be relied on always for the freshness of his observation, and the

originality of his treatment. He had mastered, moreover, under his mother's loving tuition, the three modern languages, French, German, and Italian, most likely to be serviceable to a foreign correspondent. It was in this capacity that for some years he roamed about the world.

Travelling thus far and wide, as the chances and vicissitudes of his employment took him, he saw nature in many moods ; he studied her by sea and land in many climes. He had often witnessed and could enjoy the sublimity of the tumultuous ocean wave ; the calm, deep shadows below the purple hills ; the bright glories of the changeful skies ; the vastness of the lonely desert ; the unaffected beauty of a quiet village, like his early English home, with its cackling geese, green pools, white turnpike roads, or blossoming lanes. With solemn awe he stood upon the deck in mid ocean, as the sun set behind a curtain of crimson and cloth of gold, and saw, as the good ship sank into the trough of the sea, the

billows tossed on high against the sky line, their leaden surfaces tinged with the blood-red evening glow. His vivid fancy saw pictures everywhere : in the sloppy London streets, when fog gives a mystery to the stiff architectural outlines, and the wet pavements reflect the light from the golden clouds ; among fisher folk in hovels by the sea coast ; in the endless pine forests of the far West ; in the monotonous stretches of prairie land, or the brown burnt-up plains of La Mancha ; even in the midst of the tall chimney stacks, the grimy, smouldering slag banks away northward, where Nature wears perpetually a funereal pall.

He had been blocked up among icebergs, buried beneath a sand-storm in an Eastern desert ; he had crossed the Rocky Mountains, scaled many Alps, ridden across the Pampas, gone up the Nile. He was in India at the tail end of the Mutiny ; and in '59 sketched busily through the war-trodden gardens of the Lombardy plains ; he had been upon the Danish side in the defence of the Dan-

newerke, with the needle-gun in the short campaign which laid the foundation of the German Empire, and accomplished Italian independence. His fate thus had made him a wanderer in his art, *par excellence*, a sketcher, one whose aim was to catch rapidly the spirit of the stirring but transitory scenes through which he moved. Yet he had always aspirations higher than this. He knew that by graver efforts great names must be achieved. It was with a very laudable ambition that he suffered this impulse to have its way. The year before we meet him first he had established himself once more in London, and had braced himself up to fight patiently and conscientiously, a new and more strenuous fight, for fame.

He had entered himself in the great race diffidently, but with a certain inward feeling of strength. He was courageous, painstaking, severely critical of himself. This, perhaps, was something of a fault. It made him slow to produce, very sensitive, a little changeful of purpose, frequently discontented,

easily cast down. But he had the true artistic spirit, a deep-seated reverence for the beautiful, and a thorough perception of it, with that unshrinking honesty which never shirked a difficulty seemingly hard to overcome. There were not wanting many to predict for him rapid undenial success, and there would have been more but that to the practised judgment he seemed to place his ideal too high, and ran the risk of falling before he scaled the lofty platform at which he aimed.

See him now as he leans out upon the balcony of his lodgings on the Grand Canal, the morning after his adventure with Miss Forsyth.

A handsome, well-grown, straight-limbed, young fellow of seven-and-twenty, who carried himself well, and looked you straight in the face with eyes that were a trifle dreamy perhaps, but yet calmly observant, as are always those of the true artist devoted to his craft. There was a touch of sadness about those eyes, a melancholy not easy to explain, unless

you knew how lonely he was at times, and how he yearned even now for the gentle encouragement and approving smile of the mother he had now lost three years. It was this also that made him not moody exactly, but preoccupied and absent at times.

‘A niceish sort of girl that.’ He was thinking of the young lady on the raft, as he looked down towards the Lagoon, and fancied he descried the yacht amidst the forest of masts.

It was quite early ; he tried always, especially in this bright beautiful land, to catch the first glimpse of the orient sun. Like many more he preferred the dawn to the death of day. To him sunrise was full of promise, of the tender hopefulness that surrounds the birth of everything. With sunset came sorrowful thoughts, regrets at misspent hours, energies wasted, opportunities missed that would never more return. In the morning each moment brings increasing strength to the day ; in the evening the brightest colours fade fast into nothingness, and the

most glowing tints are soon overpowered by the deep shadows of the cold, black night.

But now the early sunlight is striking the dome of Santa Maria della Salute ; it catches the gilded wings of the angel on the summit of the great Campanile ; it glitters on the smart signboard of old Guggenheim, the *bric-à-brac* dealer ; it touches with flashing points of flame the windows of the Real Prefettura opposite ; it brings out the green foliage of the trellised vine, with its little shrine at the *traghetto*, or ferry below, and plays upon the many-hued posts in the water, which are striped round and round like barley sugar.

There is life already at the *traghetto* ; the gondoliers are busy grooming their boats, which have been stabled here for the night, uncovering the little deck houses, washing down the woodwork, brightening the brasses and steel figure-heads. The gondola at duty at the ferry has already made several voyages across ; first with a party of monks bound to early mass, next with women fruit-laden returning from the Rialto market, again with

a military officer on his way to barracks and morning parade. Down below, in the little narrow street which Dominic's windows on one side overlook, people are moving to and fro. Here, in the stagnant waters of the bye canal which reflect the rosy clouds, a boy is washing in a bright green basin a mass of palpitating *volpi*, a species of polypus hideous to look upon, worm-like, wriggling monsters, large-headed, in colour an ashen red; an early fruit boat laden with pumpkins has made fast to the stairs, and a beldame who makes her living by retailing this colossal fruit in slices, baked, is bargaining volubly for her day's supply. Girls are scrubbing their *bigolos*, or brass water-cans; idlers with no settled occupation in life having just awoke look on and wonder what will turn up next to keep them alive through the day.

'Niceish sort of girl that,' repeated Dominic Gwynne. 'Good-looking, too. Good colour, her face—clean, strong, healthy colour; rich, but neither crude, nor coarse. And her hair—how well it lit up when it

caught the sun. I think if I were Strongi-tharm I'd like to paint her. Miss, Miss—she told me the name, I know, but hang me if I can remember it.'

'Not that it matters much,' he went on after a pause, 'we're not likely to meet again often. Who wants to meet her? I don't. She's a swell; a cut above me, I daresay. Let her "rip."

But she would not 'rip,' just because he wished it. Again and again throughout the day her image returned to him; again and again he found himself wondering what had become of her, and whether chance would bring him across her again. He began to regret that his time at Venice was drawing to a close; he was half disposed, when evening came, to make his gondolier row him round the yacht, but then he called himself an ass, and bent his face resolutely homewards. What had he to do with fascinating young ladies? Never since he could remember had he wasted his time in dreaming of bright eyes; idlers might fall in love, as for him his

hours were always full ; he had other work to attend to than to flirt and philander about with a parcel of empty-headed girls.

Yet Dominic Gwynne was no misogynist, no sour, cross-grained curmudgeon who affected to despise and openly railed at the whole female sex. He was far from unappreciative. So devout a worshipper of Nature's handiwork was little likely to withhold his reverence from her chiefest masterpiece—an attractive woman. And therefore, for womankind in the abstract he had the most profound admiration, the deepest respect. But it was in the collective, not in the individual sense. No one woman had ever won from him more than passing attention—chiefly, I expect, because no one woman had made it her business as yet to stalk him and bring him down. When any cruel huntress marked him for her prey it was not unlikely he would fall to the first barrel—even if he did not come down of his own accord, like Colonel Colt's racoon.

But so far fate had spared him. His

luck had not thrown him in the way of many women he could seriously like ; no woman had shown him sufficient preference to develop that liking into love. Dominic was now nearly thirty, and a bachelor still ; not from any determined negation on his own part, nor from any incapacity to imbibe the tender passion, but by mere chance. Young men marry or remain single by much as it is ruled by fate. We are thrown in this girl's way, or from that one who would suit us we are kept apart ; in either case our destiny has not been shaped by ourselves.

Dominic had been too long a wanderer to have a large circle of acquaintances. When he came to settle in town therefore he was not much in the way of society, nor did he care to go into it much. People were ready enough to open their houses to him, but he seldom chose to enter them. He preferred his quiet bachelordom ; he liked best the ease and freedom of the coterie at his club, a cheery, outspoken pleasant place, where he consorted with his fellows—men like

himself, honest workers, artists, architects, men of letters, unpolished and unconventional, but experienced, well read in men and manners, schooled in the rough usages of the world.

Now and again a friend's wife, a dear, proselytising, bigoted, match-making woman, attacked him, and declared he ought to marry without further delay.

Ought he ; why ?

No one could tell him why ; at least, not in language that was convincing to his doubting mind. But if he met the right person ? Yes, but so many people met the wrong. Besides he was happy enough as he was ; his joys were moderate, but they were substantial, his worries light, except when he voluntarily assumed the burthens of others. He made a moderate income ; not much perhaps, a mere pittance, but it was enough for one. He was far from rich, but he could rub along ; he could pay for his clothes, his lodgings and his food ; what more did a man want ?

Not much, answered his male married friends, but a man's wife wanted a good deal more. Ladies are not always contented with competence; it is not enough for them that a dress is good, it must be better than somebody else's; a house in a street will only do provided one's dearest friends do not live in a square; we can submit to drive in a hired brougham, provided our neighbours have to walk or go in a 'bus.

Dominic listened to both sides, weighed warning against entreaty, and then laughingly declared that he thought he would leave well alone.

Perhaps there were other reasons why he was heart-whole still. He had few opportunities certainly, but had he made the most of those that came? He was not the man to take a woman's fancy by storm. In their society he did not always shine, neither by the brilliance of his talk, nor by the gallantry of his manner, nor by his irresistible air. There was much sterling worth in him, but it did not lie upon the surface. He was a

dreamy, absent, sometimes moody, young fellow, abrupt, perhaps, even to rudeness. Yet his heart was as tender as a child's ; he was brimful of sympathy, of kindness for his fellows, and if he made friends slowly he made them surely and for life. Men, when they came to know him well, valued his friendship highly, and set a rich price on his good esteem ; children and dumb animals took to him at once, interpreting as it were by intuition the kindness of his sad, thoughtful eyes ; women only—such few representatives of the sex, at least, as he numbered among his acquaintance—were apt to call him uncultivated, a bit of a bear. They missed the *petits soins* which so many rigorously exact, and were unconscious of the deep chivalry which underlaid his seeming indifference.

With him, in truth, all women were raised upon a high pinnacle ; he saw their good points only, and rendered them readily the homage he thought their due. Perhaps he rated them a little above their deserts ; and

certainly he was quite unversed in their wiles. So far as they were concerned he was still as simple and unsophisticated as a child. The day of awakening might some day come; the day when his nature would be stirred to its very depths, a day when it would be found that Dominic Gwynne was capable of a passion, ardent, unfathomable, enduring for all time, a passion which might make him supremely happy or as miserable for life.

That time was perhaps approaching, and faster than he thought. Another with greater experience would have taken alarm at certain premonitory symptoms. When the same musical voice rings for ever in one's ears, when the same shapely form fills continually the artistic eye, there is surely danger abroad. But Dominic thought himself secure. He was armour-plated by his unconsciousness, having never as yet borne the shock of a single broadside he could see no reason for keeping out of range of the enemy's guns. Had he known more of

Winnifred Forsyth, certainly he would not have gone in search of her. If by chance he met her cruising to and fro, sooner than risk an engagement he would have turned tail and fled the moment she hove in sight.

## CHAPTER V.

DURING the remainder of his stay at Venice, Dominic Gwynne saw nothing more of the damsel he had rescued from her dire distress. And as the days slipped by without his meeting her, so his desire to know her better also passed away. It had been but a fleeting fancy at best, a mere freak of idiocy which could not be allowed to distract him from that which, primarily, had brought him to Venice—his art. He came hither always to work, and not to play, returning to it year after year with renewed delight, leaving it always with unfeigned regret.

He loved the place with his whole heart—the place, and many of the honest folk who lived in it. There were many homely people who called him their friend, and he appreciated them, and was ever gracious and kind

to them in return. The whole of the little world around his door welcomed him when he arrived, and wept their adieu when he went away. The trim little widow who kept the coffee shop near the Academia lost in Dominic a constant customer ; at home in his lodgings, Dona Sebastiana, the good little crippled lady who kept the house, could not speak for days before his departure, only the substantial present of a flowering plant—in the absence of much garden space at Venice, all its natives treasure with keen delight a shrub or flower in a pot—which she promised to water with her tears, consoled her for his departure ; his gondolier Francisco brought his wife and his little ones to fall at his feet, thanking him for past patronage, and humbly praying for his protection in the days to come. Others there were ; unpaid attachés, imps of both sexes, girls ready at any moment to sit to him, boys who ran messages and carried his chattels to and fro, the man in the street who spoke a few words of English, the noble lady on the first floor whom he met some-

times on the stairs, the priest who gave him snuff, the old witch who hawked her baked pumpkin with a sonorous voice as deep as a man's: all these assembled on the stairs to bid him God speed, as he stepped into his gondola on that last moment when the day of his departure had actually come.

It was with a sad heart that he took his ticket at the railway station, registered his luggage, and bade, last of all, his gondolier adieu. Then sorrowful, but resigned, he seated himself in a railway carriage, and knew that soon the last link would be broken, and Venice left far behind.

There seemed to be few passengers by this early train. So far he had the carriage all to himself. The train was on the point of moving off, when he heard a chatter of voices on the platform.

'Yes, yes, this will do. Only one man. Be quick, Eggleton, there's no time to lose.'

This was followed by the entry of the lady's-maid laden with rugs.

'Oh, no, not there,' a voice hurriedly in-

terposed, which Dominic seemed to recognise. He looked out, and saw upon the platform his young friend —, the lady of the raft.

She remembered him of course, and did not wish to renew the acquaintance.

‘Why not? Fiddlesticks! It’s too late now to change your mind. Now Eggleton, haven’t you done? There must be plenty of room and to spare; I should like to get in.’

The lady’s-maid hastened to make room for Lady Clementina Forsyth, and the latter was about to step across Dominic into her place, when she was checked by a railway official.

She had a dog, Fido, in her arms. ‘*E vietato.* It is forbidden,’ he said very peremptorily.

‘Oh dear me, no,’ Lady Clementina replied in great distress. She spoke in English, and the man did not understand her in the least. ‘I always take him with me in England on every line. They never object. I cannot part with my Fido.’

While she argued she was standing half in and half out of the carriage, interfering very much with Dominic's comfort.

The official was desolated—orders must be obeyed.

‘Oh, what are we to do? Winnifred, say what we are to do. Please advise. Call Lord FitzHugh back, or where is Mr. Grylls?’

‘They would not let them pass the barrier. What does it matter? Give the little brute up.’

‘What will they do with him?’

‘Eat him. Good job, too—he’s always in the way.’

‘Part with my Fido? never!’

Lady Clementina spoke as though Fido was the faith of her fathers, by which she would hold to the death.

As the discussion promised to be lengthy, Dominic courteously interposed, and spoke a few civil words in Italian to the official—

‘It cannot matter, surely. The dog will do no harm. No doubt the lady will pay.’

‘If the Excellency is ready to pay,’ remarked the guard, changing his tone—the prospect of a douceur was too much for the Italian’s strength of mind.

‘You are ready, Madam, to pay?’ Gwynne asked.

‘Oh, yes, anything. How good you are! Winnifred, how good this gentleman is! Give him your purse. Perhaps, sir, you will pay what is right? It *is* good of you, I’m sure. The darling.’

This was meant for the dog.

‘The darling!’ she repeated, unable longer to restrain her affection. ‘Did they want to part it from its mother? My beautiful beauty, my love, my teeny eeny weeny doggie.’

Then she called out to Winnifred, who was still upon the platform, reluctant still, as it seemed, to take her seat.

‘Come in, do, or you will be left behind. And you might help me to unpack the basket. My petty must have something to eat. He is faint, I feel sure. What did they put up

for him? Sandwiches? I do hope there's no mustard in them. He never will eat anything with mustard, and there's nothing else to be got here. Poor pet, he will be without food till we get to Verona. Dear, dear, dear me, what shall we do? Winnifred, please come in, and suggest something. *Do!*'

Thus adjured Winnifred brushed past Dominic, whose presence so far she had barely acknowledged, and saying now only, 'I beg your pardon,' with a cold bow she joined Lady Clementina at the other side of the carriage.

'It is most perplexing, Winnifred—what shall we do?'

'Perhaps there is no mustard after all. Have you looked?'

'No, of course not. It was you who said there was.'

'Did I? You're mistaken. I know better. I know there's none, for I cut the sandwiches myself.'

'You good girl. But I wish you hadn't cut them so thick.'

‘What base ingratitude!’

‘How can the pet eat them if they are so thick?’

‘Give him a knife and fork—let him imitate ‘his betters,’ Winnifred cried scornfully.

‘There’s nothing to laugh at,’ said Lady Clementina, a little nettled, subsiding into silence.

But now the train was in motion, and it was necessary for the occupants of the carriage to shake themselves into their places. Lady Clementina had taken possession of one window, installing Fido under an arbour of newspapers and upon a cushion of rugs in the seat opposite her. The centre seats front and back were encumbered with light baggage, and the only vacant place was at the other window, opposite Dominic Gwynne.

Here, with a sort of dissatisfied shrug, Winnifred settled herself. Dominic did not observe the action, nor was he sufficiently well up in the ways of womankind to understand that his *vis-à-vis* was a little out of

humour, if not exactly cross. Rather, with the blind presumption of inexperience, he took it for granted that she seated herself near him from an inclination to be friendly. Therefore he put down his book and prepared to make himself agreeable.

‘It’s rather a falling off, this—after gondolas a railway bridge —’

She was looking studiously out of the window ; the train was on the Lagoon, midway between the floating city and the main land, the only prospect water and clouds, in one wide monotonous expanse. Yet to Winnifred the sight seemed as entralling as the Lord Mayor’s show, or Mr. Irving as King Lear.

‘Is it not ?’ repeated Dominic, wondering she did not answer.

Then she appeared to be conscious for the first time that he had spoken to her. She turned her head, and as if to check his effrontery for daring to address her, said simply, ‘Yes,’ but in such frigid tones, that she might have patented herself as a new process for making ice.

‘I hope you have enjoyed your visit to Venice,’ he went on courageously.

‘Not in the least.’ This time she spoke snappishly, as though she were shutting down a box with a spring.

‘It’s a lovely place.’

Winnifred was silent. If he asked questions point-blank, she might be compelled to answer them, but she did not mean to keep up the conversation by accepting any bald assertion of his merely as a cue for denial or rapturous assent.

‘The loveliest place I know.’

A pause.

Dominic repeated the phrase.

‘Do you think so?’ Winnifred said at last, in an almost indescribable tone. It savoured of incredulous contempt; a listener would have gathered from it that she had no great faith in the breadth of this man’s experiences, and that there were really dozens of other places much more lovely which he did not know.

‘I come here year after year.’

What did it matter to her where he went? What an insufferable, forward bore he was; why could he not leave her alone? He was presuming too much upon the trifling—oh Winnifred!—the very trifling service he had rendered her.

But Dominic was himself becoming conscious that his well-meant sallies were not taken in good part. After all he had only commenced the conversation because he felt in duty bound. He had no desire to intrude himself upon other people. And there was Theophile Gautier's 'Italy' by his side; a pleasant book is infinitely preferable to an unsympathetic companion. He would make no further effort to talk. Any little enthusiasm he might have felt for Winnifred, latent these last few days, but reawakened by this unexpected meeting, vanished now into thin air. He read, but not intently; chapters upon the Beaux Arts, upon St. Mark's, Murano mosaics, Venetian character, which at another time he might have thoroughly enjoyed, had not the same absorbing attraction

now. He was possessed with a notion that in front of him was a far more interesting study—this strange girl, in appearance so winsome, in manner so curiously repellent and cold.

Why was she so ungracious? What had he done to be thus snubbed and put down? He might be *gauche*, uncouth, unskilled in the glib and showy talk to which she was accustomed, but he had tried his best to be agreeable, and if he had failed it was more from want of encouragement than from any glaring shortcomings of his own. Besides, she was a little in his debt; surely he had some claim for consideration at her hands.

This line of reasoning developed in him a certain amount of irritation against her. Full of this notion, he raised his eyes suddenly and met hers. She did not quail. In one short moment a duel was commenced between them, bloodless, but to the death.

Dominic accepted the unspoken challenge and carried the war at once into the enemy's country.

'I trust you have kept out of mischief since last we met,' he remarked, with clear, incisive intonation.

Winnifred flushed at once. The canoe adventure had been withheld from Lady Clementina, and this allusion might make her stepmother inquisitive. It was really in the hope that disagreeable topics might thereby be tabooed which had induced Winnifred to nip so abruptly Dominic's friendly advances. Almost involuntarily she looked towards Lady Clementina, wondering whether the awkward remark had been overheard. Happily the owner of Fido was just then engrossed with her interesting 'child.'

Dominic, however, caught Winnifred's glance, and, interpreting it, struck a second blow.

'Did you find another canoe? or did you embark upon some other equally insane exploit? I fully expected to hear of you on a bicycle on the Piazza, or trying to do the flying trapeze across the Grand Canal.'

He took Winnifred's breath away. She

began to regret already her unpolite attitude towards this terrible man—to cast about for some expedient to silence his audacious tongue. She saw too that Lady Clementina had pricked up her ears ; having caught a few words of Dominic's strange speech, she was roused to pay closer attention.

‘Did you finish your picture?’ Winnifred asked, with an eager interest very different from her first haughty *insouciance*.

‘Thank you. I did.’

‘But you could not find time to come and call on board the yacht.’

Here Lady Clementina broke in—

‘I had no idea you were old friends. Why did you not tell me, Winnifred, when this gentleman was so kind?’

Up to this point she had been sublimely unconscious of the stranger who had rescued Fido from exile. It was impossible, she said, to be too particular abroad. There were so many odd people travelling about ; it was very unsafe to be intimate with strangers, even with one who had proved

himself useful at a pinch. But if Winnifred knew this man, why, that altered the case.

‘Oh yes,’ said Winnifred, accepting her burthen. She was Sinbad, Dominic her Man of the Mountain; Heaven only knew when she might succeed in shaking him off. ‘This is Mr. Dominic Gwynne, a distinguished artist.’

‘An artist, too! How interesting. Landscape, figure, animal, architectural, or which?’

Dominic confessed that he dabbled a little in every style.

‘Oh, can you draw dogs? You can—I’m sure you can. Will you draw my beautiful child? Now, will you? Say you will—*Do*?’

Lady Clementina had a sort of notion that this gushing patronage would have gladdened a Landseer or a Rosa Bonheur.

‘I don’t think I could do him justice,’ Dominic answered civilly.

‘But you will try, now, won’t you—at once? You have your sketch-book? No? Here is ~~mine~~.’

And with this she produced a large volume which she kept in her travelling-bag always at hand. There was no saying when she might see a 'subject,' they were so plentiful in this picturesque land. Often she drew from the window of a railway-carriage in motion, caring little that she soon sped past her view. Another always succeeded, and the details in her drawings were always 'interchangeable.' The mountains were of the same shape and colour, the architecture as much of the same pattern as the wooden houses in a box of Dutch toys.

'Half a dozen lines now,' she went on. 'A mere scratch, that is all I want. From a real artist, from one who will no doubt be famous—who is so already, I'm sure—it will be invaluable, worth untold gold.'

Dominic good-naturedly set to work. He had no special gift for drawing animals, but poor, podgy, plethoric Fido did not make great demands upon his artist. His round body, hanging ears, and sleepy eyes, were soon transferred to paper, and Lady Clemen-

tina was raised to the seventh heaven of delight.

‘Exquisite! exact! delicious!’ she cried, half closing her eyes in an ecstasy of bliss. ‘You are very strong, very strong, and animals must be your forte. What a career you have before you now poor Landseer has gone.’

The flattery was a little too thick to flow. Dominic merely smiled, while Winnifred turned away with an unmistakable sneer. She might sneer as much as she pleased. This other foolish, fussy, gushing lady, promised to be much more agreeable. Besides, she was an artist, and his heart warmed towards her as a comrade of the brush.

‘Your book is nearly full. Will you permit me to look?’

‘They are beneath your notice,’ said Lady Clementina. ‘Mere slight sketchy things. Nothing serious. This is only my “study” book.’

‘It is always interesting to examine rough notes. They are first thoughts—suggestive,

hopeful, while finished work too often shows the disappointment of unsuccessful aims.'

'Quite so, of course. Sketches are so suggestive,' said Lady Clementina, showing her teeth. Winnifred looked out of the window, as though she thought these two well matched.

Meanwhile, Dominic, turning over the leaves, soon took Lady Clementina's measure. It went rather against the grain to praise ; but, happily, art has a full vocabulary, thanks to the art critics, so he was at no loss for words to conceal his real opinion. Thus, this sketch he said was well thought out, and that well put in ; a third was in good keeping ; another excellent in tone. They displayed a nice freedom of touch. No doubt the whole of the drawings would serve as most useful memoranda to the person who did them.

All the time he talked he fancied Winnifred's eye was upon him. And it was, curiously taking stock of him, and debating whether he was a simpleton, or a humbug, or a knave.

Lady Clementina, on the other hand, was charmed with her new acquaintance.

‘And now, Mr.—ah, Glyn, may we see something of yours? Dear me, how delightful this is. I had dreaded a long railway journey. I never dreamt I should pass a pleasant hour or two among real works of art. You will not refuse me. You cannot, now; can you—eh?’

Dominic’s portfolio lay in its case under the seat, and he had no desire to disturb it. No craftsman cares to exhibit work still in an incomplete state—pictures especially, unfinished, unframed, and in the rough, are seen to a great disadvantage. He protested, therefore, and resisted to the utmost. Then, seeing Winnifred absolutely indifferent, he grew nettled. She thought him an impostor, probably.

‘There is one picture you may like to see,’ he said to her, as he dragged out his portfolio.

‘Not of Venice, I trust?’

‘Well, yes; from a raft?’

At which Winnifred bit her lip and made no reply.

It was not a large collection, for Gwynne was a careful workman, preferring quality to quantity, addicted to minute finish, and lingering, especially in his studies, lovingly over detail. But here were groups of fishing-boats from Chioggia, with quaintly decorated flame-coloured sails ; some charming streets ; a wedge of sky above a bridge and narrow canal ; the interior of a *frezzaria*, or figure shop, a strong effect of glittering brasses flecked by fire-light standing out against the cool black shadows ; a sunrise above Lido, with calm sea and quiet sky running into each other ; a corner of the Rialto market, fruit stalls, a mass of brilliant colours, under deep blue awnings ; a single gondola floating on real water moored to an old wall, of which you might count every stone.

Lady Clementina was in raptures. She had fortunately a plentiful stream of laudation always on tap. Those who, like herself, have long been *habituées* at private views

and picture Sundays, find no difficulty in fooling credulous painters willing to swallow their doses of praise.

‘These are quite too lovely,’ she cried. ‘How really clever of you! How exquisitely charming to have such a facility as this! Here is our old friend San Mark’s, and there is San Giorgio, and here the Redentore. And this sunrise on the Lagoon! I cannot imagine Lagoon painting carried further than this. Winnifred, pray do not miss this opportunity. They are quite beyond everything. Oh, thank you; thank you, Mr. Gwynne, for your excessive kindness in allowing us to see these beautiful drawings.’

So far Lady Clementina had the exhibition all to herself; for Winnifred, after looking out of the window, had yawned once or twice, and had now thrown her head back as if on the point of going to sleep.

‘This one, now,’ went on her ladyship, ‘this reminds me so of Rowbotham—his best manner; and that is Holland to the very letter. I very much question whether

Turner was more successful than you in producing the effect of Venetian atmosphere, and the strength of Venetian colour.'

'It's as well Canaletti's dead,' and Winifred roused herself to say, suddenly, 'and Guardi gone to his long home. This gentleman would have run them hard, indeed.'

Dominic took no notice of the rather ill-natured remark ; but he was, perhaps, a little struck by her art knowledge.

'I suppose you sell rapidly and largely,' went on Lady Clementina. 'Men like Murdby and Jabez Johnson, and all the great dealers, snap up what you do without a moment's delay ?'

'Christison is the only one who appreciates me. The others think little of me, I'm afraid,' said Dominic honestly.

'Perhaps you are too proud to do business with them. Perhaps you don't show your work, and are, therefore, still a great unknown. Are you like Mr. Rosetti and Mr. Burne Jones ? Don't you exhibit in the Academy ?'

'I do, when they will let me,' said Dominic laughing. 'It does not rest with me, any more than it does to make the dealers buy my work.'

'If the dealers don't, they must be blind. Don't you think they must be blind, Winnifred?'

'They probably know their own business best,' languidly replied the girl. 'They buy what they think they can sell again. Not what they like, but what they think other people will like.'

'They ought to like Mr. Gwynne's work, then,' said Lady Clementina, still stout in her championship.

'They will, if you tell them they ought, often enough, and back up your opinion by buying largely. It's all a matter of fashion.'

'There you are quite right,' Dominic added heartily, and turning to Winnifred with some interest. 'Fashion is everything in art.'

'A few generations back Zucarelli was all the rage. Who knows the name of Zucarelli

now? David Cox did drawings to pay his score at a tavern. Now you might buy a palace in Kensington, or a shop in Cheapside with one or two of them.'

'A girl not quite void of understanding,' thought Dominic.

'You are fond of art?' he asked, with some idea of conciliation.

'No; I hate it.'

'How can you be so untruthful? She draws quite nicely, Mr. Gwynne; but she will not persevere. She has no staying power. She is turned aside so easily by this thing or that; by any frivolous pursuit.'

'Boating, perhaps?'

Winnifred shot a glance, as much as to say, 'Why can't you leave me alone?'

Then she continued: 'I hate art, because nowadays it is made the vehicle for claptrap; everyone pretends to talk art. People have all the jargon on the tips of their tongues—schemes of colour, harmonies, half tones, luminosity—and not a scrap of the real feeling, of the true poetry of art. They

admire pictures, as they might tea-trays, for their glitter, or as they might a ball-dress for its colour and its trimmings.'

'Oh, Winnifred, only think——' interposed Lady Clementina.

'I never think,' she answered flippantly; 'it hurts me.'

An odd girl truly, a wayward, unmanageable, aggravating girl. Yet she began to attract Dominic more than he cared to confess. Already he was framing a hope that he might know more of her, and see her sometimes again.

'Do you travel far to-day?' he asked Lady Clementina.

'Well, no. We are going home by slow stages. We mean to halt to-day at Milan, and to-morrow go on by the——'

'Alps to England,' put in Winnifred decisively. Why should this man be made *au fait* of all their movements?

'And you?' asked Lady Clementina.

'As far as Verona only,' Dominic replied, and fancied that the announcement seemed

to send a gleam of light into Winnifred's eyes—of pleasure, no doubt, at the approaching release from his society.

‘Verona? Is there much to attract an artist there?’ said Lady Clementina.

‘It’s one of the most interesting places in Northern Italy.’

‘You don’t say so! How has this escaped me?’

‘You can’t have read your Murray or your Baedeker to much purpose,’ Winnifred said, ‘although you pretend to know them by heart.’

‘Oh, Winnifred, shall we stay too for a few days at Verona?’

‘On no account. It would be hateful after Venice. Besides, to change our plans in this sudden way would be quite preposterous.’

‘We’ve got plenty of spare time. A fortnight at the Lakes would be ample.’

‘You are going to the Lakes then?’ Dominic asked rather maliciously. ‘To which?’

'To all of them. Orta, Iseo, and half a dozen more,' Winnifred said promptly, as if to throw dust in his eyes.

But already Dominic had noticed an address upon a travelling bag, 'The Lady Clementina Forsyth, Pallanza,' and this gave him the information Miss Winnifred would have preferred to withhold. He might easily come across his fair fellow-travellers again if he wished. Why should he wish it? Then he told himself that it had always been his intention to halt at one or other of the charming towns on the Maggiore Lake, and leave Italy by the Simplon road. Should he adhere to his original plans or steer a new course? Would it be any satisfaction to be thrown again into the society of this somewhat disagreeable girl?

For such he called her, with a fresh access of dislike, as he left the carriage. The defiant nod Winnifred gave him, and the mischievous twinkle in her eyes clearly indicated that she was glad to be well rid of him.

She said so when the train was again in motion.

‘I wonder how you could make so much of a man you had never seen before.’

‘I seem to know him quite well. But, really, I thought he was a friend of yours.’

‘In a sort of way, yes; but my friends are legion.’

‘He is a genius, of that I feel convinced. Something tells me so, instinctively. I never fail to discover talent when I meet it.’

‘Your insight is very remarkable, of course,’ replied Winnifred drily. ‘But here, perhaps, it is a little at fault.’

‘We shall see. I shall treasure up that sketch of my sweet Fido, and some day, when he has become famous——’

‘Fido?’ asked Winnifred.

‘How wilfully stupid you are! No—Mr. Gwynne. When he is famous I shall remind him of our little adventure.’

‘He will want a long memory then. It will be long before he makes much name, I expect.’

‘Why should you say so? You cannot be a judge. It’s only because you have taken a dislike to him. But that’s your way, Winnifred; one extreme or the other. You either hate a man or like him too much.’

‘That’s not the case,’ Winnifred cried hotly. ‘I have never met a man yet that I liked above the smallest bit.’

‘You let them think so, at any rate. It would be kinder of you to show your hatred, instead of luring them on with false hopes.’

Lady Clementina had not yet forgiven Winnifred’s treatment of Bobby FitzHugh.

‘You should not say such unwarrantable, such abominably ill-natured things, Lady Clementina; but I disdain to defend myself.’

‘You can’t, or you would. You should be labelled “Dangerous,” like the ice on the Serpentine.’

A speech keener than those for which her ladyship was famed. For the moment it had an effect upon Winnifred; she winced, and remained dumb.

## CHAPTER VI.

A FEW days later a distinguished company was seated around the *table d'hôte* at the Grand Hotel, Pallanza.

A motley gathering, varied in aspect, and polyglot in talk. American ladies, eager to emulate each other in the gorgeousness of their apparel, with the latest and most costly *chefs-d'œuvre* from Pingat and Worth; a British parson, in a very old shooting coat, and a blue tie, with a troop of well-grown, badly-dressed daughters; a nondescript native or two, counts of the Holy Roman Empire, or young swells from Turin and Milan, with enormous shirt cuffs of the brightest hues and infinitesimal collars, German ja-ja-ing all over the place; a poor little shrivelled spinster hailing from cockneydom, but airing her French—that of Stratford-le-

Bow—with pride and volubility; several couples on their honeymoon trips, in every stage, from rapturous devotedness to unmistakable *ennui*; a crowd of children, who had better have been in bed; several dyspeptic male invalids, who grumbled at the *menu*, and insisted on eating all that was unwholesome and certain to do them harm.

Lady Clementina and Winnifred were at one of the side tables. They were recent arrivals, not yet ripe for full honours, and waiting their turn to go up higher. Practically alone they carried on their conversation without reserve.

‘Strange to see so many faces, and yet none we know,’ Lady Clementina said, after surveying the company leisurely through her glass.

‘There are more who know Tom Fool. You know the rest. A great many know us, I daresay. There’s one at least who ought to know me after all the trouble I’ve given her.’

‘Where? Who?’

‘Madame Christine, the Court milliner.’

‘In the same hotel with us; never!  
How extremely awkward!’

‘Do you owe her such a very long bill?’

‘Of course not. But we may perhaps run across her, which would be most inconvenient.’

‘Would you ignore her existence?’

‘Most certainly. It’s very bad taste.’

‘Very bad taste,’ Winnifred said enigmatically. ‘But I shall not ignore her. Directly dinner is over I shall go and claim acquaintance.’

‘Pray do not put yourself in such a false position, Winnifred.’

‘Stuff. I shall. I’d rather talk to Madame Christine than to half the swells in town. I hate the drones. Besides, she is quite an artist, and you profess to adore art.’

‘An artist? absurd!’

‘What but the most stupendous art could give Lady Shirtliffe a figure, or tone down Mrs. Barboeuf’s rouge?’

‘Winnifred, do look,’ Lady Clementina interjected suddenly. ‘Don’t you recognise that face at the end of the table? That tall figure—the man with the curly brown hair, and grave grey eyes?’

‘Where? Oh, yes! that—It’s that bothering painter man we met in the train.’

‘Mr. Gwynne, to be sure. How curious.’

‘It’s most offensive. Why should he dog our footsteps in this way? I thought we had seen the last of him at Verona.’

‘I cannot understand your antipathy to him. Have you any special reason?’

Winnifred did not answer.

‘He is very gentlemanlike, and unassuming.’

‘Perfectly harmless. That I admit. So is a caterpillar; but I don’t go into raptures when I see one.’

‘I hope he has come here to work. Perhaps he would give me a few lessons.’

‘He probably will have something better than that to occupy his time.’

‘Of course I should pay him.’

‘I wish you joy of your bargain.’

‘You would not care to join then?’

‘Hardly,’ said Winnifred contemptuously.

‘But you will come and speak to him?’ Lady Clementina said, as dinner was now over, and the whole company was on the move through the wide antechambers of this comfortable hotel.

‘This is a most pleasant surprise!’ her ladyship said, as she shook the young painter’s hand very cordially.

Winnifred could do no less; but she passed on at once to speak to a stout, rosy-faced dame, who rose rather deferentially as she approached.

‘It does one good to see you, Madame Christine.’

‘Mrs. Dobbs, if you please, madam. The other is my business name. I trust you are in good health? and her ladyship? You have been making the grand tour?’

‘Yes; and you? Do you always come abroad in the autumn?’

'Well, not regularly. Margate or Mortlake is as much as we can manage most years. But there was the Princess Margarita's marriage, and she would have the trousseau from no one but us ; so I thought I'd take a run out this way myself.'

'And I'm very glad you did,' Winnifred said heartily. 'We shall meet again here no doubt. Good night!' and she shook hands. 'Good night!'

'You have friends here then ?' Dominic asked, as Winnifred came back towards them.

'No, not exactly,' replied Lady Clementina hastily ; but Winnifred had overheard and answered for herself.

'I have—Madame Christine, a particular friend of mine.'

'A French lady ?'

'A French milliner, of the name of Dobbs, my dressmaker in fact. We're great friends. I hope, Mr. Gwynne, you are on equally good terms with your tailor ?'

'He won't let me. I should like to be ;

but he is too great a swell. Keeps hounds and drives a mail phaeton.'

' You were saying, Mr. Gwynne,' Lady Clementina interposed : ' That you would not mind my joining you in some of our sketching expeditions. If you would really be so very good, it would be an honour, a privilege I should ever appreciate.'

' By all means. I should be very pleased,' Dominic answered, as courteously as he could ; ' not that I have ever taught much.'

' But it will be so easy to learn from one so skilled. Now, Winnifred, will you not be persuaded ? This is an opportunity that you should not lose. A lesson or two now, obtained in this way—you would never forget them.'

' I had enough of lessons, years ago,' replied offhand Winnifred.

' Perhaps, Miss Forsyth has little left to learn ? ' said Dominic ; a remark which Winnifred construed into a sneer.

' I said I had had enough of lessons, and

so I have. I do not pretend to have exhausted all the knowledge of the world.'

'We ought to go on learning all of us from day to day,' said Lady Clementina, trying to look as wise as she thought the remark was; 'Every day a new line.'

'That's not a new line, but a very old one from Martin Tupper. Excellent advice, but thrown away upon me,' cried Winnifred.

'All advice is—you will never be advised till experience forces it roughly upon you. That teaches people whether they will or no. Am I right? Mr. Gwynne tell me. Do.'

'I have had plenty of painful experiences already.'

Winnifred was as proud of her troubles as Dogberry of his losses.

'Yes?' Dominic looked incredulously at this bright young creature, with her sunny smile, unclouded brow, and saucy self-reliant air. What share of painful experiences could have fallen to her lot? what could she know of the sorrows and sins, the hunger, shame,

penury, and woe with which the world is filled ?

‘ The toothache,’ said Lady Clementina, rising to the occasion ; ‘ a sore finger, or a fit of the blues.’

‘ I sincerely hope Miss Forsyth may have no worse griefs,’ Dominic said, very gravely ; whereat Winnifred stared hard to see whether he was serious. He was ; he had spoken quite earnestly, and his eyes were grave and solemn.

She was a little touched, and could not quite bring herself to frame a saucy reply.

‘ You are very good,’ was her answer, spoken simply. But there was an air of friendliness in the way she shook hands with him and bade him good night.

Next morning, Dominic returning from an early prowl in search of subjects for his brush, found Miss Forsyth in eager colloquy with a boatman. She was bargaining to take his boat by the day. But her Italian being limited, she was glad of Dominic’s assistance.

‘He won’t let me have the boat all to myself. I don’t want him. What use would he be? Does he look like a boatman?’

‘Well, no; he’s more like an opera-singer, or a stage peasant.’

The man did look a little out of place. He was far too neat and tidy even for a fresh-water sailor, with his trim beard, bright red necktie, and purple shirt.

‘I’d rather hear him sing than trust to his seamanship.’

‘Is your own more reliable? Miss Forsyth, you will tempt Providence once too often.’

‘Pooh! There can be no danger in a tub like this; it’s not like a canoe.’

‘And if it were, I should be at hand to save you.’

‘I’d rather be drowned,’ she cried, tossing her head.

‘That’s mere wilfulness. Perhaps you would rather drown me?’

‘Mr. Gwynne, you are a very strange man; why should I wish to take your life?’

‘Why should you object to my saving yours?’

‘My life isn’t worth saving.’

‘You don’t put a very high price on yourself this morning.’

‘And when did I, pray?’

She looked at him as if daring him to accuse her of self-conceit. For the first time since they had met her eyes sent a thrill through him, the feeling of which would have put a more experienced man upon his guard.

‘I implied nothing. My acquaintance has been too short to permit me to know. I merely judged you by your own words.’

‘Mr. Gwynne, answer me one question. Don’t you think me a very nasty girl?’

‘I’ll tell, *if* you will promise to answer a question of mine. Don’t you detest me most cordially?’

‘You shall have the plain truth. I loathe you.’

‘Thank you. I will be equally plain. I have seldom met a girl so unsympathetic and disagreeable.’

Winnifred laughed heartily.

'Well, now we shall start fair. I hope you are a good hater?'

'I am.'

'Do you go any lengths? would you inflict tortures, and exult in the victim's shrieks?'

'Worse. I'd turn on the thumbscrews and rack myself.'

'You are wasted in this age, Miss Forsyth. Your tastes qualify you for a female Nero. I thank my stars I shall never have to appeal to you.'

'You may want assistance from me sooner than you think. This very afternoon.'

'Perhaps you will explain?'

'You are going sketching with my step-mother, are you not?'

'Yes. Will that be torture?'

'Exquisite. But wait, and give me your opinion yourself by-and-by. I shall probably come and exult over you.'

Dominic scarcely understood all she

meant to imply, till noon found him and his new pupil busily engaged at their easels upon the shore of the lake below the town.

Lady Clementina was in a tremor of delight. She had in front of her a subject such as she loved; a real artist by her side to encourage and advise.

They had seated themselves upon a small wharf just above the water; close in front was a long prowed lake-boat, with its exaggerated helm, like an overgrown oar; it had a striped awning, and a snow-white sail; round about it, under yellow and red umbrellas, were women knee deep in the water washing bright-coloured garments; in the middle distance the red-roofed houses of the town, and clustered in among the arches over which these were built, a throng of market-people were selling fruit; beyond, closing in the picture, were the mountains range beyond range, overtopped last of all by the snow-white Alps.

The scene was intensely, almost painfully brilliant; strong white light telling upon

strong local colour; with blue mountains, blue lake, and blue sky, a picture so gorgeously beautiful that the true artist must perforce have gazed at it with awe and bated breath. Only those like Lady Clementina who had gleaned a few shreds of knowledge in the school which purveys chromo-lithographs to the shop fronts would have dared to attack it without reverence or fear of failure.

But this she did forthwith.

‘From here, I think, Mr. Gwynne? This will do, won’t it?’

Dominic was still doubtfully pondering over the pros and cons. of composition, considering how ‘this’ would arrange and ‘that’ would come, and was too much absorbed for the moment to answer her.

‘Please tell me. I am so eager to begin. Will this do?’

‘Eh? Oh yes, anywhere,’ Dominic answered abruptly.

‘Oh, but do tell me exactly. I leave

myself quite in your hands. I look to you, you know——'

‘Upon my word I beg your pardon.’

Then he stood over her, and with some minuteness explained to her his ideas as to the best ‘treatment.’

‘Oh, thank you so much. I see—yes.’

Already while she was talking she had sketched in her outline, hastily, and of course incorrectly.

Dominic returned to his easel, and had nearly thought it all out when he heard—

‘Oh dear, oh dear ! I’ve got it all wrong. Do come and put this boat right. It looks as if it were in the sky.’

Rather reluctantly he rose and went to her.

‘I think perhaps you are a little impatient.’

‘I do so want to get to the colouring, the real painting.’

‘But your outline is of the first importance.’

‘Oh, do you think so ? I can correct that any time.’

Again Dominic resumed his work. He was much mistaken if he hoped to be left in peace.

‘Mr. Gwynne! Mr. Gwynne!’ each time with a louder intonation. ‘Do tell me, please do. Would you use cobaltine or cœruleum for the sky?’

‘Tut, tut, tut, anything will do. Bistre, or dragon’s blood.’

‘I never heard of them. Are they new colours? How nice; will you give me a squeeze?’

‘A what?’ The words ‘nice’ and ‘squeeze’ in conjunction might be misconstrued.

‘A squeeze of colour.’

‘Oh. Here, pray take my box. I shall not want it yet awhile. Take what you wish.’

Another pause.

‘But I cannot find the dragon’s blood. What a funny name! Would you lay in a wash of clean yellow ochre first?’ she went on now without a check. ‘Do you use a very full brush for your sky? Oh,

do look at that woman washing under the yellow umbrella. How effective! and those stones, are they not round? And the statue—what a funny thing! I should like to have the statue in; but I can't, my paper's not big enough. How do you think it comes? Do you like it so far? What shall you do with the mountains?' as though it was possible he might put them into his pocket. 'Shall you treat them individually or generally? Mr. Gwynne, what do you think of George Hovington's work? Do you ever exhibit at Manchester? My drawing-master's son is on the staff of 'Punch'; isn't that delightful?'

Dominic was pleased to find her ideas flowed so fast that she made fresh remarks without remembering how many previous questions were still unanswered.

But then, suddenly, he was aroused by a sharp scream.

'What has happened?'

'A flaw in the paper! It's too bad. There is no good paper to be got nowadays.'

What do you use? May I look? Oh!—’ the exclamation was quite ecstatic, ‘ how sweetly pretty! ’

Rather a far-fetched criticism for a morsel of white awning and a scrap of purple distance.

‘ I think I’ll sit and watch you—may I? You do not mind? ’

What could Dominic say? Already she buzzed about him like a gad-fly on a sultry day, although he had tried to shut his ears to the distracting sounds. But now, desisting from her own sketch, she devoted herself entirely to his, suggesting, praising, finding fault with a maddening fluency which was altogether new to Dominic.

‘ There, in there.’ She bunched up her fingers, and seemed to wish to drive them through the paper. ‘ What a depth! What transparency! But I don’t like that line of the quay; and those houses—the roofs are a little too red, are they not? I would not presume to criticise, but they might be toned down—just a little, don’t you think? ’

Now, be persuaded. Do. You will be grateful to me by-and-by.'

'Oh, very much so!' cried Dominic, jumping up from his seat with a suddenness that rather surprised Lady Clementina.

But at this moment came a merry laugh from behind them, and both turned surprised.

Winnifred was standing over them. She exchanged glances with Dominic, as much as to say, 'What did I tell you?'

'I trust you have improved the shining hours, both of you? Where is your sketch, Lady Clementina? Ah, I see. You *have* got it nice and blue. You might go in for clear starching. Your cobalt beats the best "blue" in the shops.'

'Oh, Winnifred, isn't this delicious?' asked Lady Clementina, as she pointed to Dominic's drawing.

Winnifred looked at it, and then at the painter. There was no mistaking his appealing look; and with a meaning smile Winnifred came to the rescue.

'You must have had enough of this,

Lady Clementina. Let me take you over to Isola Bella.'

'How?'

'I've my own boat.'

'Can you row so far? Haven't you got a second oar?'

'May I be allowed to offer myself,' cried Dominic, with an eagerness that was not lost upon Winnifred. Was it simply gratitude for the relief she brought him?

'*Can* you row?' There was much coquettishness in the tone of her enquiry.

'A little: try me.'

'How about the torture. Have you suffered much?'

'Agonies.'

'Dear me,' asked Lady Clementina. 'What is the matter?'

'Corns,' said one.

'Tic,' said the other.

'And you have been bearing them mutely all this time! Poor man.'

'The pain was excruciating; but now I am better. A row on the water will do me good.'

'But do not let us waste your valuable time,' Lady Clementina said. 'You will surely finish this? You will try the alterations I suggest? You will, I feel sure you will?'

'Another time; I'm afraid I shan't do much more good to-day.'

That is as you choose to consider it, Mr. Dominic Gwynne. You are at this moment all unconsciously drifting into very dangerous water. Dangling right in front of you is a very attractive bait. You can see it, poor innocent gudgeon, but not the hook beneath. All that catches your artistic eye is a very beautiful young woman in a spotless white dress with rich creamy-coloured ribbons; under a broad brimmed straw hat a bright open face with merry eyes and a provoking mouth. The sunlight wanders through the warm tresses turning them to gold, and throws a warm shadow on the pure white throat. Her figure, with its slender, graceful outlines, stands out like an exquisitely cut cameo against the purple background; yet she har-

monises with the landscape, and like it is warm and rich in colour, and her musical voice has a ripe, full tone.

Winnifred pulled stroke, and, therefore, was full in Dominic's sight in the voyage across the lake. Long before they reached Isola Bella, he had planned a picture to be painted some day: a female figure, half-length, rowing, the pliant back bending with the stroke; a long shapely neck, slightly turned, with the face in profile; a mass of splendid hair disarranged by the exertion, and escaping in masses below the hat, which had fallen back from the head.

Lady Clementina, directly she landed, was for sitting down to draw. She had forgotten her first failure in the delight of a new opportunity.

'Will this make a picture? The Pescatori in the middle distance, nets in the foreground, and stones. Capital, Mr. Gwynne, don't you think?'

'Quite,' Dominic replied abstractedly. His eyes were wandering after Winnifred,

whose figure was disappearing rapidly round a corner of the palace.

‘Or how would it be to take the village and the palace stairs, with Stresa beyond? Wouldn’t that be nice?’

‘Very nice,’ said Dominic, parrotlike. He was thinking how much nicer it would be to follow Winnifred.

‘Or the landing-place, with the boats below, and the garden above? Wouldn’t that be charming?’

Again Dominic echoed her ladyship’s words, but his notion of the charming just then was something very different.

‘Do please advise. There is so much choice. I am quite bewildered. What do you propose to do yourself? Have you settled?’

To go after Winnifred with as little delay as possible, that was what he proposed to do; and this, in spite of Lady Clementina’s entreaties, he presently did.

Winnifred was examining an old boathouse just beyond the village when he

caught her up. She took no notice of him at all, until he spoke.

‘Miss Forsyth——’

‘Well?’ she asked coldly; but her look said plainly as the plainest English, ‘who sent for you?’

Then seeing he hesitated, she went on,

‘Have you got a message from Lady Clementina?’

‘No; I only came because——’

Because he could not help himself, was the only excuse he had ready to advance, and that would have sounded absurd.

Could she tell what was the matter with him? Could she detect the change that was coming over him? A girl of several seasons has sharp wits, and Winnifred with her experience quickly diagnosed his condition. She could read him like a book, could recognise and give their exact value to the new ring in his voice, to the diffidence, not to say *gaucherie*, of his manner, and the awkwardly-veiled meaning in his glance.

‘Because?’ she repeated.

‘Because I’d far rather talk to you than stay with her.’

‘Of two evils you would choose the least? But suppose I won’t be chosen?’

‘You cannot be so hard-hearted.’

‘I told you this morning I had no heart—that cruelty was my delight.’

‘And now you would practise it on me?’

‘Certainly, sooner than be annoyed!’

‘I annoy you?’

‘Very much.’

‘I am in your way?’

‘A great deal.’

‘Shall I go back to Lady Clementina?’

‘At once, please.’

Dominic hung his head, turned on his heel, and went his way. He took her command quite literally when another would have interpreted it as a coquettish intimation to remain. Winnifred looked after him with a queer little smile, then slowly walked off in the opposite direction.

Already Lady Clementina was in difficulties with her sketch. There was a grit in

the paper, she said, and the colour would not flow; the clouds were more than usually fidgetty this afternoon, and the fishermen would not leave their boats alone. Her despair was so piteous that it quite won Dominic over.

He set busily to work to restore her drawing to something intelligible.

Presently from chaos came order; a deliciously dreamy haze settled over the distant hills; light and shadow, clean cut and sharply indicated, marked the marble quarries above the town of Baveno; a line of twinkling white houses lined the shore of the lake; in the middle distance upon one side rose the picturesque *campanile* and high roofs of the Isola dei Pescatori; all across the foreground, laid in boldly with a full brush and broad strong colour, was the beach, a wide sweep of iron-grey, time-worn pebbles, half-hidden amidst patches of coarse olive-green grass.

‘I like that,’ a voice said abruptly, at sound of which Dominic started and looked up.

It was Winnifred returned ; as gracious in aspect as her voice was encouraging and kind.

‘Is he not the most wonderful man ?’ asked Lady Clementina, enraptured. ‘Winnifred, is he not quite too clever ?’

‘It is certainly a most charming sketch,’ Winnifred said frankly.

Praise from this quarter was a little intoxicating ; but Dominic kept his head sufficiently to say simply—

‘I am glad it pleases you. This sort of thing is only a trick, mere sleight of hand. Anyone almost can learn.’

‘I wish you would teach me,’ Winnifred said eagerly.

‘You’ve not had enough of lessons then ?’

‘Not when I find a person competent to teach. I misdoubted your powers, I confess, till now.’

‘Winnifred, what presumption ! You might have seen that Mr. Gwynne was a true artist like——’

‘Madame Christine?’

‘I could never aspire to produce anything so artistic as Miss Forsyth’s dress.’

‘You do me too much honour, Mr. Gwynne. I only question whether in that matter you are a qualified critic.’

‘I once designed dresses by the dozen. Ladies’ dresses.’

‘Gracious goodness!’ cried Lady Clementina. ‘Why?’

‘To earn my living. I was artistic costumier to the Royal Prince’s.’

Her ladyship was yet more astonished. Why should a real artist design female dresses for a royal prince?

‘Which of the princes?’ she enquired.

‘The one that lives in the Strand.’

‘There’s no royal residence there——’

‘The theatre, of course; he means the Royal Prince’s Theatre,’ Winnifred said, rather amused. ‘You have had many curious experiences, I daresay?’

‘My share, certainly.’

‘I do like a man who knows something

more of the world than is bounded by St. James's Street and the Row.'

These were pleasant words to hear, and they were spoken with enough *empressement* to make them very grateful to the ears of the semi-subjugated Dominic Gwynne. Did she begin to like him really?

He hardly dared to hope; yet for the rest of the day—on the voyage back, in the quiet gloaming, upon the tranquil lake; after dinner, in the yellow moonlight, as they strolled through the garden of the hotel—it seemed to him quite evident that she was doing her best to be affable and kind.

Winnifred was in truth like another person. When she chose to be agreeable her power of fascination was undoubtedly great. She could throw a charm of intense sympathy into commonplace questions; could infuse a subtle drop of intoxicating flattery into the simplest speeches of approval. At this early stage she did not pause to ask herself whether she was acting fairly to Dominic Gwynne.

I will not accuse her of mere wanton wickedness ; of a reckless love of conquest ; of inconsiderately seeking to draw him on, only to be cast on one side by-and-by like a worn-out glove. It was with her simple thoughtlessness, not deliberate cruelty. If for a moment any misgivings crossed her mind, any compunctions at the part she was about to play, she dismissed them peremptorily and at once. She had no wish to make a fool of the man : and surely he was too wise to let her ?

All that she wished was to meet him half way. He appeared disposed to make his submission : to substitute proper appreciation for his former callous contempt. Admiration, be it understood, had been so long and so freely rendered her that she looked on it as her right, and sorely chafed when she missed it. Therefore he deserved to be equally well treated by her. Now that he showed himself civil, courteous, duly attentive, she would act in the same spirit, and forgive him mercifully for his sins.

Alas for Dominic Gwynne ! Winnifred, with her artless desire to be merely encouraging and kind, was preparing for him about the heaviest punishment it was in her power to inflict, or which he could be called upon to endure.

No knowledge of her reputation did he possess. It could not reach him. They moved in totally different spheres. There are in London as many worlds as an onion has skins. Between the inner fashionable core to which Winnifred belonged and the toiling ants on the surface outside, there was no closer connection than between the centre of the vegetable and its outermost coat. All that he knew of Winnifred Forsyth was what his eyes had told him. There was no one at hand to warn him—Lady Clementina alone excepted, and to her the necessity for any such warning never presented itself; no one to paint her in the dark colours with which the palettes of many might have been set—to describe her as a dangerous flirt, as a female Ishmaelite with her hand against all mankind.

He took her, therefore, as he found her—as many other unfortunate wretches had found her—a most ensnaring siren ; and so, lamblike, went to his fate.

That night, when running over the day's incidents in his mind, it was surprise chiefly that possessed him ; astonishment that hitherto he should have done her such scant justice, that he should have been so blind to her beauty, to the irresistible charm of her manner and her ways. And just as heretofore he had hurled adverse criticism, so was he prompt with excuses now. Where before he had accused her of flippancy, he saw now only exuberant spirits and love of fun ; he called her brusqueness, independence, her love of unfeminine pursuits, the superabundant energy of vigorous health.

We are very prone thus to deck out our idols in purple and fine linen as soon as we have raised them in their shrines ; the ugly deformities that once offended our eyes are then partially shrouded, or altogether concealed, according to the intensity of our worship.

## CHAPTER VII.

THEY were days to be marked with white stones—those that now followed: days the like of which Dominic had never known before. The same strange fate that had made him and Winnifred first acquainted seemed to be working now to throw them continually together.

In the first place there were the drawing-lessons, which, having commenced the day after the visit to Isola Bella, were steadily continued. Winnifred proved herself a sympathetic pupil, with great natural aptitude and intelligent taste. Hitherto these qualities had lain dormant. She had indeed intentionally assumed indifference, being driven into this open antagonism by Lady Clementina's gushing effusion, accompanied as it was by such manifest incompetence in art. Sooner

than be classed with such a professor Winnifred pretended to have no art proclivities.

But now she was roused almost to enthusiasm, listened patiently to advice, strove to perform with humble painstaking effort every task her master set. Of course her only desire was to improve in art. Nothing could be further from her thoughts than the wish to stand well with Dominic Gwynne.

Then, as luck would have it, Lady Clementina, after the first few days, was seized with a sudden indisposition sufficient to keep her for a time in her room. So the two young people were left to pursue their studies undisturbed, and their intercourse resolved itself into a *tête-à-tête* of the pleasantest kind. For hours and hours they were practically alone together; Mrs. Eggleton did propriety, but the discreet humble-minded chaperon knew her place—which was a long way off—and kept it.

Of course the relations between the two as the days slipped by in delightful sequence grew more and more cordial and close. They

became soon most excellent friends. Winnifred frankly admitted to herself that she liked Mr. Gwynne, that she had never before met a man so much to her taste. If she did not say this openly and in so many words she was at no pains to conceal the fact.

As for Dominic, although long since his heart was gone out towards her, he was far too humble-minded to entertain even the vaguest hopes. Now and again he fancied with a strange spasm of pleasure that perhaps—only perhaps, and to the smallest extent possible—she began to appreciate him. But such good fortune seemed too tremendous, and he would not dare to allow himself to believe in it yet awhile.

I think Winnifred liked him none the less for his reticence and self-restraint. Forwardness was not a quality, she was wont to declare, which found favour in her eyes. Any of the gilded youths who had hitherto pursued her in vain would have gone wild with delight at half the opportunities that Dominic turned to so little account. Yet with less worldly expe-

rience he was perhaps wiser in his generation than they would have shown themselves. It was because he made so little of his opportunities that he had so many.

Winnifred said she accepted his company gladly and without a second thought because she felt perfectly safe with him—safe from silly nonsense, without fear of impertinence direct or implied. This sense of security made her a little reckless perhaps. Her hardihood was like that of the keeper who enters the lion's den and tempts Providence once too often. Dominic did his best to hide his feelings, but the time might come when, under the provocation of her coquettish favour, he would find it quite impossible to hold his tongue.

See them now. They have been sketching as usual, and are seated upon the green-sward of the chestnut woods up above the town. At their feet trickles a tiny rill, all that summer has spared of the raging wintry torrent from the hills; opposite, close at hand, is the quaint old church of Santa Maria

della Campagna, with its roof of grey red, an octagon lantern surrounded with a loggia, and tall *campanile* with windows double-arched ; in the middle distance a green hill, under wing of which nestle Pallanza's double towers and the long red prison barrack ; beyond a strip of shining lake ; then the roofs of gleaming Intra, and the white town of Laveno under its twin-peaked conical hill.

Round about them are the grand old chestnut trees, standing singly like great men conscious of their strength ; here also are a few humble vines clinging lovingly and low, tobacco plants with their shining leaves, mulberry trees, aspens, a few pearl-grey willows, walnut trees, ferns, and wild briars, all flourishing in the wild exuberant richness of the South.

The scene was soft, the air mellow, the sky serene, all nature seemed in perfect tune. The lake glittered under the sunlight in ripples of gold ; the clouds ranged themselves in movements as harmonious as the rhythm of song ; there was a newer and more exqui-

site beauty in the proportions of the eternal hills. Stillness almost absolute prevailed, broken only at intervals by a distant church bell, played by madcap boys almost in polka time, by the fall of a chestnut from the heavily laden trees, the hum of bees busy on the wing, a shrill childish voice, or a mother's lullaby.

What wonder that there was a subtle indefinable charm for Dominic in this entrancing landscape ; a charm deepened and intensified by the companionship of the beautiful girl at his side ?

He could not work. The colour would not flow, he could not concentrate his thoughts. He tried a bit of intricate drawing, the articulation of bough and branch, and straightway his eyes wandered to admire the tangled disorder of Winnifred's undisciplined hair. A cloud crossed the sun and shed upon the lake a fleeting effect of light and shade ; long before his fingers, once so nimble, tried to seize it, the motive for his study was gone ; the chance had evaporated while he lingered, talking

lazily with Winnifred a dropping fire of dreamy indolent talk.

‘How idle!’ she cries. ‘How lazy you grow. Did you have lotos leaves for lunch to-day at the hotel?’

‘That would make a good picture.’

‘Lunch at the Grand Hotel?’

‘Heaven forbid I should paint such a subject. You are dull of apprehension this afternoon.’

‘Upon my word, Mr. Gwynne.’

‘Or perhaps you have never read Tennyson?’

‘Try me—

In the afternoon they came unto a land—  
In which it seemed always afternoon.

I should not like a country where it was always afternoon.’

‘No? Why not?’

‘Too suggestive of laziness, of luncheon just over, of garden-parties, stupid afternoon teas.’

‘You’re somewhat material, Miss Forsyth. There’s a want of poetry about you.’

‘What insolence! I can see the picture as well as you can. The great ship just grinding on to the shore; the Grecian warriors disembarking, some already landed; the beautiful landscape beyond, the gleaming river flowing seaward, the snow-capped peaks, the palms, the shadowy pine above the woven copse.’

‘I apologise. But the great feature of the picture must be the mild-eyed melancholy lotos-eaters —

Dark faces pale against the rosy flame.

Yes, I see it all.’

And as he spoke he removed his drawing-pin from his sketching easel, and replacing it by a block of clean paper, he commenced with masterly rapidity to give pictorial expression to his thoughts.

He did not speak again for some time; nor did Winnifred resent his silence. She had risen from her stool, and was standing over him watching with interest every stroke he made. There was a very close bond of sympathy growing between them.

Presently Dominic cried—

‘ T’t, tut. I can’t do them justice. Those graceful girls—

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem.

Of course I must have models; but now, when the spirit moves me, if I could only fill in the principal figures——’

Then he looked round with rather a worried, distracted air, and his eyes fell upon Winnifred standing by his side.

‘ Ah! of course. Please stand a little further off.’

With a frown of displeasure Winnifred went.

‘ There, there, not so far. Now raise your arms high, as if you were holding a bough over your head. Capital. Don’t move.’

It was extraordinary how submissively she obeyed.

‘ How beautiful! The pose is just perfect. The profile, not Grecian certainly, but very exquisite, and the colour of the flesh splendid’ —a strange method of flattery, but not exactly displeasing.

‘How long, pray, do you wish me to remain in this ridiculous attitude?’

‘You can’t possibly want to sit down yet ; I’ve only just begun.’

‘But I do.’

‘Pooh, pooh ! You must wait.’

He spoke quite sharply, as though he were lecturing a model.

‘I won’t be spoken to in that way,’ she began, quite pettishly.

‘Then I shall never employ you again.’

Winnifred saw that he was in the clouds, and nerved herself to further endurance.

‘It comes first rate,’ he said at length ; ‘you’re a first-rate figure.’

‘Thank you ; you’re very good.’

‘Arm a little long below the elbow ; and head just a little too much on one side. But on the whole, very satisfactory. No, no, not yet’—seeing she was ready to drop. ‘One moment more. There ; that will do.’

And Winnifred, with a sigh of relief, sat down.

‘I trust you won’t ask me to “sit” to you again. It’s far too irksome.’

Dominic woke up.

'I really beg your pardon. I had quite forgotten the fact of your existence. Irksome? What is irksome?'

'The *rôle* of a model.'

'No doubt. You idle young ladies of the great world little know how hard life is to thousands and thousands of poor folk.'

'If you are on that line, I think we deserve to be pitied too.'

'What can you know about a hard life?'

'My life is that of the galley slave—one long round of incessant unlovely toil. No one works harder than we London girls.'

'Not the sempstress?'

'Mere child's play.'

'Nor the shop-girl behind the counter? Remember, from eight A.M. to nine at night. Never once allowed to sit down; meals in a hurry; driving hard bargains hour after hour with the certainty of dismissal in case of repeated failure. You cannot form a conception of her weariness when her day is done.'

‘It’s nothing to mine. Her hours are not so long. I begin——’

‘Not early, come.’

‘No, but I end late. I see the sun rise, at the wrong end, not when I get up but when I’m going to bed.’

‘You get no “beauty sleep” then?’

Winnifred looked at him as much as to say ‘Do you think I want it?’

But he met her glance steadily, and she was in doubt whether he was dull of apprehension or far too deep for her. She went on.

‘I am not asleep till five, and by eleven I have started on horseback for the Park. Home again to lunch by half-past one; a crowd of stupid people there probably whom it is my bounden duty to amuse; then in the afternoon it is a regular scramble, or one would be left behind. Racing through exhibitions—miles of them; taking one’s turn at the “Pops,” reading George Eliot’s last, and Froude, and John Stuart Mill; a glance at last night’s debate, to see how far the

Government is right in pressing the Ballot Bill to a division ; one must discuss the pros and cons. for the vacant bishopric, the merits of Henry Irving as an actor, the rival claims of armour and chilled shot, who is to win the Grand Prix, the newest fashions, the last invented colour, the flirtations past, present, and to come. Then one must appear at all the proper places, go to State concerts and State balls, to Hurlingham and Lillie Bridge, to receptions at the Foreign Office, and fancy balls at Marlborough House ; drink oceans of afternoon tea, dine every night at this or that house in state, be seen at the opera for an hour or two, do two or three "at homes," and wind up finally with several hours' physical exertion in a densely-packed black hole of Calcutta, commonly called a London ball.'

'And do you never say *cui bono* ?'

'Never ? I am always saying it only in English. And I give myself the answer too. It's no good, none at all—a mere waste of life. I would give worlds—whole worlds——'

'One would think they were very plenti-

ful, and could be had by the dozen, or the gross.'

'Don't interrupt me. Whole worlds to escape, to surrender society with its shams and get in exchange some serious purpose, some distinct aim and object in life.'

'Devote yourself to art. You might do right well in it if you chose.'

'I? Absurd! Keep such gross and palpable flattery for Lady Clementina. She might swallow it. I can't.'

'Lady Clementina has not a particle—not the remotest particle of your power. I am quite surprised to find what you can do. Yet you said you had no skill, that you knew nothing about art.'

'Did I? That was one of my modest days. I am really very clever, only I do not always choose to say so. I am also singularly beautiful, and uncommonly well read. In fact, it would be difficult to meet with a girl so superior to the common run.'

'There I quite agree with you. It's true

my experience is limited ; but you are about the best I've met.'

' I didn't ask you for your good word ; and if you talk like that I shall go and sit with Eggleton.'

' Well, but joking apart, with your gifts—'

' Gifts ! I hate the word. It reminds me of Lord FitzHugh's housekeeper, who when she found me sketching at Burcham, put her head on one side, and said with a sigh, " What a gift ! " '

' You have a most decided gift, nevertheless, and you ought to carry it further.'

' Where shall I take it to ? What outlet can I find ? There is no opening for us women ; every avenue is closed to us.'

' I trust you don't take up the question of Woman's Rights ? '

' No ; but I am jealous of mén—of their freedom, and their power. I envy you, as a man.'

Dominic thought that others, men, might envy him too. Just then his lot was enviable

enough. Spell-bound by her voice, enthralled by the glamour of her bright eyes, he would have changed places with no king upon his throne.

‘I envy you,’ she went on, ‘the privilege of battling with the world. We women are compelled to stand by and look on. You do all the fighting.’

‘Is your nature so combative, Miss Forsyth?’

‘No; but I hate inaction. I want always to be up and doing. I cannot bear to be twiddling my thumbs from morning till night. I wish I had to work for my living. I wish I had high aims like you have.’

‘Have I?’ asked Dominic, as much of himself as of her.

‘I should think so. I should be greatly disappointed in you if you had not. It is your aim, surely, to be some day a famous painter, to become a member of the Royal Academy——’

‘Stop! stop! You go too fast. They’re not convertible terms.’

‘Is not every Academician famous?’

‘It depends upon the exact definition you put upon fame.’

‘I call it fame to be on every tongue, to be admired on every side.’

‘Admiration is a luxury for which many Academicians have no particular craving. They affect to despise it. So those say, at least, who do not get it; and this is the fate of some—not a few.’

‘Oh, Mr. Gwynne, how ill-natured! You are jealous. I thought better of you.’

‘You mistake me, Miss Forsyth. For some names among “The Forty,” as we call them, I have the most profound respect. One or two of them I reverence as I do the great masters of old. But there is a residue—not a small one—whose works do not inspire me with the liveliest emotion.’

‘And they are——?’

‘I will not particularise.’

‘But still you would not refuse to be one of their number? You would like to write R.A., or A.R.A., after your name?’

‘ The desire is not with me an absorbing passion. I mean that it does not keep me awake at night. I should be glad to be an Academician, of course—we are all alike in that respect. The rank is worth having for the ease and comfort it brings ; the secure place on the Academy walls, and that place always “the line” ; but I wish to be something more. The *cachet* it is supposed to give does not dazzle me ; it’s only lacquer, varnish, veneer. A man does not paint better pictures for the diploma ; he often paints worse, considerably worse. It is never wholesome for a working man to be withdrawn above competition. My only wish, and I wish it heart and soul, is to do the best work I can, and not to be known by this name or that.’

‘ And yet you pretend you are without high aims ! ’

‘ When I said that I was not thinking of art, but of something very different——’

‘ Mr. Gwynne, do look at this lizard. Isn’t he funny ? ’

Dominic took no notice of the question.

‘An aim so ambitious, so high placed, so far beyond my wildest hopes of attainment that I doubted whether I should confess to it or deny my creed ; an aim——’

‘Mr. Gwynne, tell me, are you in the Volunteers?’

There was so much energy in this remark, that he was compelled to reply.

‘No. Why do you ask?’

‘They’re always aiming, aren’t they, at a target or something? Do they ever hit the mark?’

But Dominic was not in the humour, just then, to be easily put down.

‘They do if they are really in earnest, as I am now.’

Winnifred jumped up hastily, with an ejaculation that it was late. It was so dangerous to be out of doors in Italy towards sundown. They had better be moving home-wards.

‘One moment,’ Dominic said impressively. To give greater stress to his words

he laid his hand upon her arm. 'Stay—only one moment. Will you give me your advice? I am in difficulty.'

'You would not be guided by my advice, I feel certain. Why ask it?'

'I will abide by it—I will, indeed, even if I cannot agree with you.'

'Make haste then; at this rate it will take years.'

He looked up, trying to catch her eyes, but they were averted. She had re-seated herself, and having once more attacked her colour-box, was painting away vigorously.

'I want you to tell me whether you think it possible for a man to be engrossed by two passions?'

'I have heard of men who were engrossed by a dozen.'

'Not seriously.'

'Well, as seriously as men are with any passion but that which has self for its object.'

'You judge men harshly. A man is readier to make sacrifices than a woman.'

‘That I deny. Women are capable of the utmost self-sacrifice—for persons they like.’

‘Are you?’

Winnifred started a little at the abruptness of the question, but she recovered herself speedily, and said—

‘That would depend.’

‘Upon the person?’

‘I said persons. But look at Eggleton. I declare I think she’s asleep, or next door to it.’

Dominic, like the loadstone, still pointed fixedly to his north.

‘I have tried always,’ he went on with intention, ‘to devote myself wholly and solely to my art, to follow it with that singleness of purpose so high a calling requires.’

‘That was very praiseworthy, very noble of you. If you only continue as you have begun you’ll do.’

‘But art is a jealous mistress; she admits of no divided worship.’

‘Doesn’t she? I didn’t know.’

Her tone implied, too, that she didn't care. Why did he tell her this?

'But of late, since—no matter when—I have been brought under another, and a more engrossing influence. I have fought against it strenuously.'

'It certainly is a surprising thing,' Winnifred said, as if, at length, she was about to take her share in the discussion.

'Does what I say surprise you?'

'I didn't hear what you said. My remark was *à propos des bottes*.' At the moment she was turning over a dead leaf with the point of her foot. 'It is a most surprising thing that Cobb's boots always go first at the toe. Can you explain it?'

'I have not given the subject much attention.'

'I wish you would.'

Dominic was beginning to be a little disgusted with the way in which she fenced and foiled him at every turn.

'You are more than usually flippant to-day, Miss Forsyth.'

‘And you more impertinent. You permit yourself to use very extraordinary language this afternoon, Mr. Gwynne.’

‘Not more than the occasion demands. You will not be serious—not for one second.’

‘Not upon compulsion, certainly.’

‘Although the subject on which I would speak to you is of the deepest import.’

‘To whom, pray?’

‘To both of us.’

‘Pardon me. Speak for yourself. I am not aware of any community of interest between you and me.’

‘You mean that?’

‘Most assuredly.’

‘I admit my mistake then.’

And he began hurriedly to pack up his painting gear, as if preparing to move off.

‘You are going?’ she asked.

‘Yes; back to the hotel. I have letters to write for the evening post.’

She laughed—a little, short, contemptuous laugh, which sounded like ‘Ho! ho!’ and might be interpreted to mean, ‘Hoity,

toity !' or, 'With all my heart ! Go, as soon as you like !'

The ridicule it was tinged with hardened Dominic all the more against her ; but courtesy compelled him to offer to escort her back to the hotel.

'Or perhaps you prefer to remain longer ?'

'Pray give yourself no concern for me, Mr. Gwynne. We are quite able—Eggleton and I—to take care of ourselves.'

'*Au revoir*, then,' he said, although he felt at the moment as if he would be pleased never to see her again. She was incapable of deep feeling. He had done with her. He would withdraw now while there was still time ; retire, not as one ignominiously overcome, but with drums beating and colours flying, and all the honours of war.

'Mr. Gwynne ! Mr. Gwynne !'

It was Winnifred's voice recalling him, before he had got half-way down the slope towards the church.

He went back.

'I think you have forgotten something.'

‘Something I had to say?’

‘No; something belonging to you. Is not this your property?’ She held out to him a little gallipot, such as painters use for their megilp.

‘I don’t know; I think not.’

‘You refuse it? You won’t have it?’

Was there a hidden significance, a double meaning in these simple words? The valueless bit of japanned tin lay in her ungloved hand—a small, shapely hand, smooth as satin, and white as milk.

‘Take it, or leave it; only be quick,’ she cried.

‘It’s not mine.’

‘Not if I give it you?’

‘I am not worthy of so priceless a gift; and it comes rather late.’

‘Late?’ Her voice changed a little; she did not like his hesitation. Was he angry with her, or merely dull?

‘Yes. My painting is over.’

‘Only till to-morrow, I presume?’

‘To-morrow I leave for England.

‘Mr. Gwynne!’ The suddenness of the announcement surprised her into giving the slightest inflection of chagrin to her voice.

‘I ought to have started days ago. It would have been better. I was doing no good here—merely wasting my time.’

Still blind—pурblind, densely, hopelessly blind.

‘You’ve kept the secret very well then. But you know your own business best. I can only wish you—*bon voyage*.’

She had regained her composure, and spoke with the most absolute coldness and indifference.

Only when his back was turned, with a gesture of extreme vexation, she hurled the tin gallipot far into a clump of chestnut trees, and then sitting down on the grass, hid her face in her hands.

In all her love affairs before this, it had cost her no pain to play the coquette. This was the first time in which she had suffered from her own capriciousness. It served her right. Wayward, contrary, full of whims, it

had amused her to play him—to give him full length of line ; but she never thought that he would wriggle completely off the hook.

Something very like bitter disappointment possessed her. Young ladies do not always know their own minds. Sometimes they are ready to cry for the moon ; but if it was given them, and the sky was short a planet, they would declare they wanted a cheese !

## CHAPTER VIII.

WENNIFRED was a little shy with Dominic when they met next morning. It was at breakfast time. Lady Clementina had come off the sick list, and the two ladies were at a small table by the window eating their bread and honey when Dominic approached them.

How would he behave? Winnifred was not without a little tremor of apprehension; but she was no coward, and she looked up at him with a short, interrogative, rather defiant glance. It met with no response. She might have been an absolute stranger. But Lady Clementina he greeted warmly, and congratulated her on her restoration to health.

‘I hope you are well enough to recommence work, Lady Clementina. You were getting on so capitally.’

‘The arch humbug,’ thought Winnifred.

‘Oh, really now, Mr. Gwynne,’ Lady Clementina replied, with a simper, ‘you are too flattering—quite too flattering—yet I do feel, I confess I do feel that I have gained a greater insight, a broader grasp, a—a—’

‘They come always with increased facility.’

‘Which you think I have attained?’

‘Undoubtedly.’

‘Was there ever such unblushing perversion of the truth?’ Winnifred wished to say, but left the words to be expressed by her eyes and the downward curve of her lips.

‘There is something in your freedom of touch which reminds me of Constable,’ Dominic went on, as though to exasperate Winnifred, ‘the mysterious blottiness of Corot, almost the exuberance of D’Aubigny, and the breadth of old Chrome—’

‘With the atmosphere of Turner, and the sunlight of Claude,’ broke in Winnifred, who could keep silence no longer.

Dominic looked at her blandly, as if she had not spoken.

‘Oh, Winnifred.’

Lady Clementina nearly blushed.

‘What do you propose to do to-day, Lady Clementina,’ Dominic asked. ‘Are you equal to sketching out of doors?’

‘Quite equal; and most eager after your kind encouragement. Are you at leisure yourself this morning?’

‘Perfectly: to-day, to-morrow; any day this week.’

And this was the man who only the evening before had declared he must start forthwith for England.

‘I should like to try new ground. Let us make an expedition. Up Monterone, say?’

‘Detestable,’ Winnifred said.

‘I thought you liked climbing?’

‘Not on donkeys—or with them.’ This last was *sotto voce*.

‘If I might suggest, a trip on the Lake. To Luino, and by carriage to Lugano,’ Dominic remarked.

Winnifred objected at once.

‘Lugano is most uninteresting.’

‘Or to Locarno, at the head of the Lake. There is a pilgrimage church there, the Madonna del Sasso, worth seeing.’

‘I hate sight-seeing,’ Winnifred interposed pettishly. ‘I won’t go to Locarno.’

‘You can stay at home then,’ said Lady Clementina, with some decision. ‘Mr. Gwynne—you will be my escort? We might take lunch, and our things, and oils.’

‘And a salad. You can dress it with what you don’t use for painting.’

‘Winnifred, I never knew you so disagreeable. What is the matter with you, to-day?’

Winnifred shook her head angrily, as though she resented the rebuke before a third person, and getting up from the table left the room.

Half an hour later Lady Clementina and Dominic Gwynne were on board the little steamship *Verbano*.

There were not many cabin passengers, but the forepart was crowded with peasants, field hands going to the delta around Bellin-

zona for the vintage, and a number of Italian 'navvies' bound for Airolo and the quarries about the St. Gothard Tunnel.

These people, quaint of aspect and varied in costume, amused Dominic, and soon after the steamer started he went forward to make a few memoranda in his sketch book.

The first person he encountered, just in front of the funnel, was Miss Winnifred Forsyth.

He was bound to speak to her.

'So you *have* come? Commend me to a young lady for rapid change of mind.'

'Are you irreproachable? Why haven't you gone to England?'

'I couldn't tear myself away from Lady Clementina.'

Winnifred's lip curled.

'She is so amiable, so sympathetic.'

'Mr. Gwynne, I certainly do despise you from the bottom of my heart.'

'I trust I shall always deserve your high opinion.'

'I did think, once, that you at least were

truthful and straightforward, but after this morning—'

'I thought also that you had some sense—perverted, perhaps, and rudimentary—still *some* sense of humour.'

'You mean, then, that you were merely making fun of my stepmother? So much the worse. And as she is my near relative, I protest against your want of courtesy.'

'You are not generally so prompt to defend her.'

'But I suffer no one else, no outsider, to attack her. What's more, I shall take the first opportunity of putting her on her guard against double-faced friends.'

And she walked off as if to put her threat into immediate execution.

Dominic followed, feeling the least bit silly and uncomfortable.

'Winnifred!' cried Lady Clementina, 'you on board! What a madcap, unreliable girl it is. I had no idea you had come. Where have you been hiding?'

'For'ard — talking to Mr. Gwynne—

and I want to tell you what he's been saying.'

Dominic's face flushed. Was there ever such a malicious, mischievous, spiteful creature?

'You must not believe implicitly all Miss Forsyth tells you.'

'I cannot compliment you on your good manners, Mr. Gwynne.'

'T't, tut, tut,' Lady Clementina said, 'let there be peace between you,' and she turned to Dominic as if to get away from an unpleasant subject.

'I'm so glad you've come back, Mr. Gwynne. I did so want your advice. I should like to begin work. But there is so much to be done. Every instant a fresh scene.'

The steamer, as it sped along, skirting the shore, passed town and village—Intra, not unlike Venice, Laveno, Luino—all white and smiling under the autumn sun.

Lady Clementina's fingers were itching to be at work.

‘That gendarme—look at him: and the old priest, and the little trees on the piazza. Ah !’

She might have hurt herself.

‘What a sweet church—and those cypresses, and the statues, and the Scotch firs—’

‘In Italy—’

‘And a dear little island—with a castle on it. Two dear little islands—and two castles ! How droll !’

‘Why don’t you do a drawing of them for “Punch ?”’ growled Winnifred.

‘How rude you are, Winnifred.’

‘I am only taking a leaf out of Mr. Gwynne’s book.’

‘You’re quite implacable, I fear, Miss Forsyth.’

‘I hate hypocrites. I can’t bear people who say one thing and mean another.’

‘Oh, Winnifred—do be more circumspect.’

‘No one could tax Miss Forsyth with ambiguity,’ Dominic said, quite able to de-

fend himself. 'There is not the least attempt at disguise in the words she employs.'

And having thus unburdened himself, he turned his back on the young lady, and devoted himself with elaborate small talk and much advice to the other.

Winnifred felt just a little left out in the cold.

Presently she walked away forward again. She wished to be alone. Anger was in her heart against this man whom she began once more to detest. All kinds of uncomplimentary epithets occurred to her, but none seemed sufficiently strong. He was *gauche*, ungentlemanlike, insincere ; in every way hateful, quite beneath her contempt.

And so changeable ! He had declared he was going to England. Why had he not gone ? No doubt it was merely to annoy her, out of bravado, simply ; to vex her, to spite her, to prove that her treatment of him had not given him the smallest spasm of pain.

Oh ! if she could but pay him off in his

own coin. Flout him, reject him, drive him to despair !

Next instant she resolved to dismiss him altogether from her thoughts. She did not want him. He might go about his business as soon as he pleased. And as if to shut him out more completely from her mind she seized her drawing materials and began to work.

There was a quaint scene upon the deck just below her. She attacked the subject at once, sketching with the bold, rapid freedom natural to her, and which had been greatly developed by the practice and teaching of the last few weeks. This is what she saw :

Four tall, large-limbed, good-looking countrymen, with faces bronzed a deep brown, and rich dark beards, dressed all alike in olive-green suits, all alike wearing the same big black slouch hats, all having their legs crossed the same way, all holding in their right hands gigantic umbrellas of coarse calico, one in colour bright blue, another sage green, a third brickdust, the fourth

madder brown with a border of pale yellow. In their left hands all carried long-handled scythes, with blades like ancient scimitars ; and at the feet of all were woodmen's axes and spuds, and baskets, through which peeped ragged ends of handkerchiefs, and green cabbages, and fruit golden and red. For background there was the Lake, its tone a dull green, and the prevailing key of colour was preserved by the drab and yellow woodwork of bench and companion-ladder, and the sloppy planks of the not over-clean deck.

She was so absorbed in her work that nearly an hour elapsed before she looked up.

Lady Clementina and Dominic were standing over her.

‘ Dear me ! How excessively odd ! What a very funny idea ! I can't say I quite understand it ; but you are so *outré* in your taste, Winnifred.’

‘ It's like a bit of Eyre Crowe,’ Dominic said heartily. The artist could not deny praise to true artistic treatment and keen artistic perception.

Winnifred eyed him sharply, then hastily shut up her sketch book.

‘Are you as much in earnest this time as usual, Mr. Gwynne?’

‘I think the sketch is extremely clever.’

She made as though she would throw the book into the Lake, but Dominic restrained her and caught it in his hand.

‘Don’t be so ridiculous,’ Lady Clementina said. ‘The sketch is very well, and Mr. Gwynne will touch it up for you, or I will.’

‘Your kindness overpowers me,’ Winnifred said, with a small curtsey. ‘But what are you doing, Mr. Gwynne?’

‘Taking possession. The sketch is mine. I claim it as salvage. I may have it, I suppose?’

‘On no account. I’d sooner put it behind the fire.’

‘Oh, as you please.’ Dominic spoke with something like a sneer as he returned her the book.

The breach between them was growing wider and wider.

Winnifred continued to hold aloof for the rest of the voyage. They lunched on board, but Winnifred sat at table without speaking. On landing at Locarno you would not have thought she belonged to the party. As they breasted the steep slope towards the shrine, alternately she hurried on far ahead, or lagged quite behind. When the chapel was reached she declined to enter, but went on alone into the monastery garden, and again commenced to draw. The others joined her here presently, prepared also to sketch the matchless panoramic view; then she threw down her pencil as if nothing would induce her to work.

'How extraordinarily restless you are, Winnifred. Do pray keep quiet for five minutes. Mr. Gwynne, isn't this exquisite? Would you advise me to introduce the church?'

'That depends upon whether its presentable.'

'You're too feeble, Winnifred.'

'Miss Forsyth's humour is always so delicate and refined,' added Dominic.

With a pettish shrug of the shoulders she got up and walked away.

‘Where now?’

‘To explore. I can’t sit still all day.’

‘But don’t go far: this is a strange place——’

Already Winnifred was out of earshot.

‘Mr. Gwynne, is it safe, do you think, for her to wander about alone?’

‘I imagine Miss Forsyth is quite able to take care of herself.’

‘Yes; or at least she thinks so. But does she remember, I wonder, that the steamer leaves again at five?’

At this moment Winnifred appeared at a turn of the road some height above them.

‘She appears bent upon a climb. I don’t think she ought to go so very high up. Motion to her—call to her,’ cried Lady Clementina.

They both stood up and waved their hands. Lady Clementina shouted, ‘Come back,’ in a shrill treble, and Dominic repeated the cry with a deeper note.

Winnifred for answer pointed upward.

*'Excelsior, I presume.'*

'Mr. Gwynne, do oblige me. Go after her, and make her return.'

'I shall have to do it by force. Miss Forsyth would never attach weight to my expostulations.'

'She will, this time—if you tell her I insist. Now, do go, please. At once, while you can catch her up. And at least it will be a comfort to know you are with her ; she cannot then come to much harm.'

Dominic accepted the trust, and started off, little reckoning how far the enterprise would lead him.

It was not until he had gone some way up the road, at a rapid pace, that he made out Winnifred's figure in front and above. She had left the main road, and was now upon a narrow mountain path, not unlike a steep stone staircase.

He shouted to her loudly. Did she not hear ? Surely she did ; but she paid no attention, only as if to evade pursuit she quickened her pace.

But he gained on her slowly and steadily. She knew it, by intuition, perhaps, but now and again a furtive glance behind assured her she must soon be overtaken.

All at once, worn out and breathless, she stopped short, and dropping on to a convenient rock, suffered Dominic to come up alongside.

She looked as insolently interrogative as her exhaustion would permit.

‘Lady Clementina sent me after you,’ he said, meaning to imply that without express orders he would not have come one yard.

Winnifred made no reply.

‘I was to remind you that the steamer left at five.’

‘Is that all?’ and when Dominic nodded, she waved her hand as much as to say, ‘The interview is over; you can retire.’

But he seemed in no hurry to depart. Having taken a short survey around, he also seated himself upon a boulder just opposite Winnifred, and coolly prepared to fill his pipe.

‘It is idle, I fear, to remind you that your society is entirely unsolicited.’

Dominic did not seem to hear her. He was absorbed in thought, while his eyes wandered restlessly to and fro ; peering first up the slope above them, looking anxiously into the thickets around, then down in the direction by which they had climbed.

Presently, having struck a match and lit up, he rose to his feet and walked away. Only a few paces, however ; then back. Again he moved off, in another direction. A third time he returned, and tried a fresh outlet.

Last of all, he reseated himself, and gave vent to his feelings in a low whistle.

‘I must again remind you that you are *de trop*. You would oblige me by returning to Lady Clementina.’

‘I can’t.’

‘Not without me ? Were those your instructions ? Then understand—if I am to stay till doomsday, I won’t go back with you.’

Dominic shook his head, and again whistled.

‘I think you are more *gauche*, more annoying, more aggravating than any man I ever met.’

‘Come,’ he said soothingly, ‘let’s be friends.’

She laughed a short, scornful laugh.

‘Never; I dislike you too much.’

‘That’s a pity. It would be better to make friends—now.’

‘Why now, more than before?’

‘Because we are likely to see so much of one another.’

‘Not with my consent, I promise you.’

‘Ah!’ he smiled. ‘Lucky there are plenty of leaves about—and birds.’

‘If Hanwell were handy, it would be more to the purpose.’ Winnifred spoke with increasing anger and amazement.

‘Did you ever hear of the Babes in the Wood?’

‘What childishness is this?’

‘We are the Babes in the Wood. We have lost our way.’

Winnifred started, and looked at him uneasily.

‘Is this some miserable joke?’

‘I wish it was only a joke. It’s real downright sober earnest. It’s all up with us.’

‘Impossible. I won’t believe it.’

‘Don’t. I won’t, if you can find a way out of the scrape. But I’ve tried, and I tell you frankly, I’ve failed.’

‘Why, it’s most easy, I’m sure. The Lake lies there: we came up with the sun at our backs; we have only to go straight down, facing it.’

‘My dear young lady, don’t you see that this dense undergrowth makes every passage blind or impenetrable? There is no path. The last vestige we left half an hour ago. Now we’re in the midst of a jungle—a precipice perhaps at our feet, a straight mountain-wall above us. The case is nearly desperate.’

Winnifred was now thoroughly aroused and frightened.

‘I scarcely take it in yet ; and you—you cannot mean that you despair already ? You haven’t half tried yet.’

‘I know these mountain solitudes so well. They’re like labyrinths, impossible to thread if you lose the clue.’

‘But you will make further efforts—you won’t give in ?’

He shook his head rather mournfully.

‘Only a coward would abandon hope so readily. Can it be possible that you are one ? Come, Mr. Gwynne, make another move.’

He only smoked on in silence.

‘I declare I am heartily ashamed of you. This is unmanly—to be so poor-spirited, so weak-hearted ! It’s contemptible.’

Sarcasm and sneers had no effect on him.

‘Do, Mr. Gwynne, do try something ; please, please do.’

Still he made no sign.

‘Then I shall, alone.’

‘Well, try. But come back, if you can ; and don’t go out of earshot, or beyond where I can follow.’

'I don't want you to follow.'

'Oh, but I must. I should prefer it. I should hate to die alone.'

'Psha! you exaggerate,' Winnifred said contemptuously, but with an inwardly sinking heart. Then gathering her skirts tightly around, she braced up her courage and her strength, and went off to make out a path by herself.

Dominic was still smoking his pipe when she returned. Her dress was a good deal torn, and her flushed face wore a look of blank despair.

'It's too dreadful'—she began.

'What did I tell you?'

'It's far worse than I anticipated; and yet we came up so easily.'

'To descend is always a hundred times more difficult.'

'But what *is* to be done?'

'We must be resigned,' Dominic replied very calmly. '*Kismet!* We might have a worse fate. Certainly starvation by inches is—'

‘Nonsense. It can’t come to that. We *must* be rescued; they must come to us long before, before——’

She could not bring herself to utter the word ‘night,’ the contingency appeared so appalling.

‘Perhaps in a week or two at the earliest——’

Winnifred could not check a little scream.

‘I hope you will be able to hold out. Even a day without food is trying. And you will be worse off than I am.’

‘How so?’

It sounded as though he had a private store, and meant to keep it all to himself.

‘I have my tobacco. Would you like to share it?’

‘Oh, Mr. Gwynne, you make my blood run cold. Is there nothing to be done, nothing you can suggest? You are so heartless, so apathetic; you sit there like a stock or a stone. But it’s really nothing to you.’

‘Not to be starved to death?’

‘You will not understand.’ Then, piteously,

she appealed again. 'Mr. Gwynne, for the last time I entreat, I implore you to try whether there is really no loophole of escape.'

'I'll try,' he said abruptly; 'but on one condition.'

'And that is——'

'That you promise to become my wife.'

Winnifred's face turned first white, then reddened to deepest crimson. Next moment the hot tears sprang to her eyes, and she said in a voice half-choked with sobs—

'Is this chivalrous? Is this the generosity of a true gentleman? Do I deserve to be treated like this?'

'No, no; I am a brute—the biggest brute unhung. I was only jesting. I have been, all along.'

Winnifred looked up eagerly.

'Do you mean that we can really get away?'

'Not easily; but it is to be done, I feel sure.'

'And all these difficulties? They can be surmounted?'

‘Yes, if you will be brave, and will trust to me.’

‘Have you behaved so as to deserve my confidence?’

Dominic hung his head a little.

‘You said I was a hypocrite. I was only acting up to the part.’

‘Oh, Mr. Gwynne, to remember my thoughtless words and turn them against me! How unkind, how unfair!’

‘I am sorry—I beg your pardon.’

‘You have humiliated me, terrified me beyond measure. I cannot forgive you.’

‘I did it all for your good. The lesson will be useful to you, perhaps. It has given you a sharp but wholesome fright.’

‘How dare you?’ she cried, stamping her foot with sudden rage. ‘You have no right to lecture or admonish me. Your arrogance and assumption know no bounds. Your conduct has been quite inexcusable. I shall not speak to you again.’

‘You must before the day is out—on business.’

She was silent.

‘Remember we are still in bottle.’

Not a word.

‘Still in the wood, in fact.’

‘Oh !’ with another gesture of wrath.

‘This is too childish. Let us be going.’

‘Are you ready ?’ he asked, as he offered her his hand.

She refused it with a vigorous negative.

‘You must take it.’

‘I won’t.’

‘Only as a matter of business,’ he said with a laugh.

And so the descent began.

But there was nothing to laugh at in the prospect before them. This downward journey was really a very serious affair. Not impossible, perhaps, as Dominic had pretended at first, but much more difficult than he supposed, or than he cared to confess now, when they actually came to encounter it.

There were three distinct evils to face.

First was the difficulty of progression. The gradient was exceedingly steep, the

ground slippery, stony, often much impeded by brushwood and obstinate undergrowth. Next was the sickening doubt whether they were in the right road ; path or track there was none ; they might be travelling straight to destruction, or very wide of their goal. Last of all the day was advancing, and with it waned the precious light.

Nevertheless, inch by inch, slowly, and in spite of all, surely, they won their way down. Sometimes one was in front, sometimes the other. Here Dominic was compelled to lift Winnifred bodily over the boulders of a half-dried water-course ; then, when the drop was deep, he lowered her by her scarf, and swung himself after her by the help of a young tree. So, sliding, jumping, creeping by turns, half an hour passed, and hardly a word had been spoken between them.

Both thoroughly realised that they were in a perilous position. But Dominic did not refer to their danger, although his set lips and grave eyes betrayed his apprehension. Winnifred pretended to be unconscious of it,

lest any weakness of hers might injure his nerve. But admiring his reticence, recognising his skill, his courage, and his strength, her recent resentment rapidly faded away, and was replaced by a newer and a stronger sensation of regard.

‘What’s that?’ Winnifred cried suddenly, ‘Bells! Don’t you hear them? Cattle-bells.’

‘There are always cattle pasturing on these hills.’

‘Then there must be people tending them.’

‘Yes; but the beasts wander far, and are as agile as goats. However——’

They listened, and presently moved in the direction whence came the sounds. It certainly seemed as if hereabouts the trees were taller, the spaces between them were more open, fewer stones lay strewn about, the brushwood was less dense.

‘I do believe I see a pile of winter fuel. There—below. Look.’

‘What of that?’

'Fuel, chopped. Now wood can't chop itself. Those who chopped it must come again to carry it away.'

'Not for ages, perhaps.'

'No, but they will have worn a path. That is our line, depend upon it. Keep up your heart, Miss Forsyth. The worst will soon be over. I will go on ahead, fast, as fast as I can. Keep me in sight.'

He hurried forward, crashing and tearing impetuously through the low bushes, surmounting easily every obstacle, eager only to reach the firewood, feeling sure that a fresh departure from this point would bring them safely and soon to their journey's end.

Winnifred followed more slowly. Dominic was now some hundred yards or more ahead; in another minute or two——

'Ah!' she put her hand to her heart as if in a sudden access of pain.

Dominic had thrown up his arms, seemingly bent, by a violent effort, upon staying his downward career; then he clutched wildly,

but in vain, at an overhanging bough ; next instant he had disappeared.

Winnifred, with a sickening sensation of terror, went forward. What could have happened ?

She was not long in doubt.

There at her feet opened a great chasm, a yawning gulf, a long lateral fissure, the wall probably of a winter waterfall, dry now with continuous summer drought. It was like an enormous ha-ha or sunken fence, quite hidden till you stood upon the brink, and the more effectually because very soon the ground trended upwards again, and regained a level little below that upon which Winnifred stood.

Dominic had fallen, that was evident ; he had tumbled headlong into a terrible trap. Even now she heard the rattling of the stones and *débris* he must have disturbed as he shot past.

Awful thought ! Perhaps at that moment he lay down there at the very bottom of this deep abyss, hurt, helpless, perhaps dashed to atoms, already dead.

She did not hesitate long. With reckless, almost feverish haste, she essayed to follow him, at all costs, even at the imminent peril of her own life. Fortunately for her, the descent was not arduous ; had Dominic approached it at anything but a break-neck pace impossible to check, he could have gone down safely enough. Winnifred's eyes were preternaturally sharpened by the intensity of her anxiety, and she quickly discerned how best to climb. Her eagerness also emboldened her to face many awkward points, at which, otherwise, her heart might have quailed.

One idea only possessed her, to the exclusion of every other. She *must* reach the bottom, and know the very worst, and that without a second's delay.

So, passing nimbly from platform to platform, and from crag to crag, she came presently to the spot, and saw, alas ! her worst forebodings confirmed.

Dominic upon his back, motionless, inanimate, apparently dead. There was his hat, a long way off ; between his fingers were the

tufts and shreds of grass he had seized, madly but hopelessly, as he rolled along ; one or two stones lay about him which had followed and overtaken him, one had struck him and brought the blood on his forehead.

With a wild shriek, Winnifred rushed towards the body.

‘Mr. Gwynne ! Mr. Gwynne !’ she cried, as she knelt by his side.

His heart ! Did it beat ? His pulse ; had it stopped ? His hands ; were they stone cold ?

In her frenzy and agitation she could not diagnose his condition. She could only imagine the worst ; and as her paroxysm of terror increased, she first chafed his hands frantically, then put them to her lips and kissed them again and again.

At this moment he seemed restored to life. His eyes unclosed slowly, fixed themselves on hers, dreamily, then gratefully, then with a glint of drollery in them which was nearly unmistakable.

Winnifred dropped his hands, and jumping up, blushed deeply as she spoke.

‘How long have you been conscious?’ she asked with much asperity.

‘Long enough, thank you. And I like it’

‘What is the meaning of all this?’

‘I wanted to see what you would do.’

‘And you are not hurt?’

‘Not in the least; and if I were, I’d gladly go through it all again, provided, provided—you understand.’

‘It’s disgraceful to let me fall into such a trap. I should have thought you incapable of it. It’s unworthy of you, unkind, wickedly unfair.’

‘All’s fair in love and war.’

‘Don’t dare to use the word.’

‘Come, Miss Forsyth, you cannot go back now. And if it’s not love it must be war. Do you want war still?’

‘No; not quite that,’ she said, in a low voice. ‘We’ve had enough fighting for one day.’

‘Peace then?’

‘If you insist.’

‘I do ; and I impose terms. Unconditional surrender. An indemnity—’

‘In what coin ?’

‘Part paid already ; and between the high contracting parties an alliance—’

‘You travel a little too fast, Mr. Dominic Gwynne. I cannot agree to that.’

‘Never ?’

‘Not for a long time to come.’

‘I can wait,’ he said ; then changing his tone he took her hand in his, and went on, ‘I will not press for an answer now. I will bind you by no promise ; remain free as air as long as you like, but do not say that I may not hope.’

‘Would that satisfy you ? There could be small comfort to you in such an arrangement as that. You would not be contented with your position for long.’

‘Try me.’

‘I will not.’

Dominic looked at her appealingly.

‘I will not ; for I will tell you honestly

and at once, Mr. Gwynne, that I like you ; I like you better than anyone I have yet met in the world——'

He wished to thank her in a lover's passionate language.

‘Wait a bit. I like you as I say, but I cannot promise to marry you. At least I can give you no promise to-day, nor yet to-morrow, nor yet at the end of the week. I don't know when I could. Not soon ; but some day perhaps, before my hair turns grey and my voice is cracked. Will that do for you ? There, there——’

Again he wished to thank her in something stronger than words.

‘That will keep ; we have still to get out of the scrape. We ought not to delay any longer. It is growing late. Lady Clem——’

Then, hand in hand, they went forward once more, and within half an hour rejoined Lady Clementina in the garden by the church.

‘What has happened ? Where have you been ? I thought of asking the monks to ring the alarm bell ? I never was so frightened in

all my life,' Lady Clementina cried, very much put out.

Winnifred answered promptly—

‘It was all my fault. I went too far, and we lost our way, and Mr. Gwynne had an accident.’

‘Nothing very serious, I trust?’ said Lady Clementina, as she looked at his frayed clothes and dishevelled hair.

‘A fall; nothing more. I rather liked it,’ Dominic replied.

‘Oh, do tell me all about it. Where did it occur? how? who saved you? you must have had an extraordinary escape.’

‘Perhaps, as it is past four, we had better be moving down to the town? When we are re-embarked you shall have a full account.’

On the voyage back to Pallanza, Dominic, at Winnifred’s special request, devoted himself entirely to Lady Clementina.

The girl, strangely subdued and silent, sat apart, and seemed desirous of communing quietly with her own heart.

## CHAPTER IX.

I FEAR that neither Dominic nor Winnifred felt there was the least necessity to tell Lady Clementina exactly what had occurred between them. Why should her stepmother know? Winnifred asked herself. Nothing had been definitely settled. There had been merely an interchange of sentiments; he had made her a declaration, but she had not accepted him in set form. She had given him no distinct promise. She had only confessed—in a weak moment—that she really liked him, and that some day, no matter when, but by-and-by, in the far off future, perhaps she might consent to become his wife.

How could this vague, intangible sort of compact be explained to Lady Clementina? It would lead to all sorts of unpleasantnesses—

a disagreeable raking up of the past, uncomplimentary comparisons, doubtless much detraction of Dominic Gwynne, undue glorification of Bobby FitzHugh, and of others she had sent away.

For of course she was perfectly alive to the fact that by no effort of that poetical exaggeration which lovers have always at command could Dominic be exalted into a good match. In all probability he was an extremely bad one. He was poor; he lived by his art, she supposed, but what that might mean in pounds, shillings, and pence Winnifred had not the faintest idea. Nor did she care to know. There would be enough for bread and butter no doubt, and for watercresses perhaps. She wanted no stalled ox.

Besides, some artists were passing rich—so they told her—and held their heads as high as the best. They built themselves palaces, owned country houses, had carriages and horses, and went to Court. Not that Winnifred coveted them the enjoyment of

such pleasures or possessions ; knowing their exact value, she could easily forego them. But why should not Dominic climb to the top of the tree, and be as famous and as prosperous as the rest of his trade ? That he had great talents, perhaps something more, she was fully convinced. She felt certain that in the long run he would carve out for himself a great name. Then a softened look came over her face, and she half wished she had already found her place by his side, to prove his true helpmate, encouraging him to persevere in adversity, giving him ready sympathy to sweeten and intensify success.

Ah ! but when might that be ? Winnifred could not make up her mind to surrender herself just yet. Nay, within a few short hours of the momentous scene upon the mountain side, having regained her courage, much of her old waywardness also returned. It irritated her rather to see how self-satisfied Dominic appeared ; she resented the manifest gleefulness of his face, his air of

full contentment, as though he had obtained all that he required upon earth. It was necessary, she told herself, to remind him what was the exact state of affairs, to impress upon him that he must not take too much for granted, that he must be content to wait on, in patient hope, pending her sovereign will and pleasure. Unless he gratefully accepted the crumbs without demanding the whole loaf, he might expect any summary treatment, perchance dismissal, without a glimpse of forgiveness or a chance of recall.

Certainly she dashed away the cup a little rudely from his lips.

It was the very next morning, Dominic, radiant with his success, had come to her in the garden. The immensity of his good fortune had, in truth, almost turned his head. He seemed to walk upon air. That he should have won from this peerless creature, this pearl without price, this intoxicatingly beautiful girl the admission that she liked him, the promise that some day she would

become his wife—it was more almost than he could believe.

And therefore, a little diffidently and doubtfully, he had said :

‘ When shall you tell Lady Clementina ? ’

‘ What is there to tell her ? ’

‘ Why, that we understand one another.’

‘ Oh, but do we ? I understand you, perhaps, and see through you ; but are you sure that you understand me ? ’

‘ Surely, after what occurred yesterday—surely you would not go back from your word ? ’

‘ What word ? I gave you no promise, not in so many words. Don’t twist my language into what it was never intended to mean.’

‘ You said you would marry me.’

‘ Some day. By-and-by that was ; I said that some day, when we were both old and bald, and fat, and grey, I might *perhaps* become your wife ; but all that is a long way off still, I trust. At least, my hair still keeps

black, and I don't feel very old, whatever you may be.'

These words were like a jet of icy water upon his budding hopes. He tried hard not to seem downcast, but failed miserably as he said :

' I suppose I shall get wiser soon. It will better for us to part, for a time.'

' Altogether, if you prefer it,' Winnifred replied coolly.

She had been mastered and overmatched, when off her guard ; but she wished now to readjust the balance.

' Don't let's quarrel so soon, Winnifred—'

' We shall, if you presume, Mr. Gwynne.'

' But, Winnifred, as we have only a few days more to be together.'

' Another threat. You have cried wolf once too often, Mr. Dominic Gwynne.'

' This time it is you who are going. Hasn't Lady Clementina told you ? The carriage is already engaged ; I've seen the man,

and you are to cross the Simplon in two days' time.'

'She never consulted me,' Winnifred began, rather hotly.

'The opportunity was a good one, it only occurred this morning. There was no time to be lost.'

'Well, but'—Winnifred shifted her ground promptly, and with all the ease of her sex—'won't you come with us?'

'If I only might.'

'Of course you might; and shall. Leave it to me. I will speak to Lady Clementina.'

'But suppose she suspects something?'

'I tell you there is nothing to suspect. If you talk like that, you shall be left behind.'

And she left him in a state alternating between elation and abject uncertainty, to go in search of Lady Clementina.

It would be impossible to imagine anything more unconcerned and cold than Winnifred's manner when she hinted to Lady Clementina that Mr. Gwynne might be asked to join them in the journey across the Alps.

‘I should have mentioned it myself,’ Lady Clementina said, hardly concealing her surprise; ‘but I thought you disliked him so much that it would bore you to have him any longer with us.’

‘I did; indeed I find him only just bearable now. But I am willing to sacrifice myself. And it’s better to have a man in the party.’

‘That was quite my idea. Particularly one who has been all over the world, and who is so inoffensive and unpresuming like this Mr. Gwynne. I’ve no doubt we shall find him of great use.’

Lady Clementina at least did not hesitate to draw upon Dominic’s good will, from the moment the driver cracked his whip as they rattled off from the Pallanza Hotel. It was quite one man’s business to attend to her, and this Dominic found to his cost. She had Murray and Baedeker by her side, but she kept up a running fire of questions, and insisted, by dint of repetition, upon a categorical reply to each. Fido, blessed pet, occupying the seat in front of her, was not suffered

to doze on undisturbed ; his cushions had to be frequently rearranged—by Mr. Gwynne ; he must be taken for a run—by Mr. Gwynne ; he must be fed, and watered, and coaxed, and patted on the back, all by Mr. Gwynne. Then the sun struck hot in the narrow defile between Mergozzo and Vogogno. Could not Mr. Gwynne arrange some shade ? When, with elaborate pains, he had set up his sketching umbrella and lashed it to the hood, Lady Clementina declared that the air had turned chilly and she missed the heat.

For all these petty annoyances there was but one compensation. Seated with his back to the horses, he had leisure now and again to gaze, without let or hindrance, upon Winnifred's comely face.

But the second stage, from Domo D'Ossola upward, proved far more enjoyable. Here the serious ascent began, and it behoved those who could walk to spare the horses. Neither Dominic nor Winnifred were slow to avail themselves of the chance.

‘Now this is what I like,’ Dominic said,

as he stepped out briskly. They had passed Isella and the frontier column; already it was plain, from the rapid flow of the tumbling waters and the keen, invigorating air, that they were fast gaining a considerable height. 'I wish we might go on walking like this for ever.'

'Up mountains? Perhaps we must, up metaphorical Alps, far more difficult to climb. Has it ever occurred to you what there is before us to do?'

'If we were in partnership, I'd face all the world. But you won't join.'

'You must first prove all you say. You have your work cut out for you. You must become distinguished—an R.A.—I insist upon the R.A., although you affect to despise it.'

'Say an Associate, please, or I must withdraw altogether from the field. No one could get the full diploma nowadays in one generation. The average time is about two-thirds of a century.'

'You ought to have been an Associate long ago. You must have been very idle all

these years, or very incompetent. What have you been doing with yourself? Why are you so backward? I have my doubts about you. When did you first take up art?

‘I can hardly tell.’

‘Absurd. You *must* be able to tell.’

‘I cannot tell because I hardly know. It came to me as a matter of course. It never seemed to me possible I could be anything else—from the first; from my cradle. I believe I tried to draw before I tried to talk. So my dear mother said—while she was still alive.’

He paused as though he were treading upon sacred ground.

‘You were not thwarted then, as so many great painters have been before you?’

‘Not by her, dear soul. And yet I had a hard fight. It was not easy to come by an art education,—even a few years ago.’

‘There was the Academy. Why did you not enter as a student? It’s open to all.’

‘By competition only. There were six

vacancies, and hundreds of us. I was nowhere.'

'Whose fault was that?'

'Well, mine of course. But I was driven so hard to earn my bread, I could not do my "competition-drawing" justice. I was working day and night; now at wood blocks, next colouring photographs, then designing patterns for a furniture shop, or dresses for burlesques. One long job, and not a bad one, was on illustrated advertisements for the hoardings: umbrellas, pickle-jars, shows, wild beasts, sensational performances at the Surrey. I got at last upon a comic paper, the "Grin."'

'That was better, I suppose?'

'It made me "grin;" within a month it died, and never paid me a penny. After that I starved.'

'Now I know why you took it so easy on the mountain.'

'There was no temptation there. I've been so hungry I did not dare go by the cookshops; I felt I should break the win-

dows and seize the savoury puddings. It's not a pleasant situation to go without breakfast — worse when there's no dinner to follow.'

'But you were brave and steadfast ; you worked on ; your luck came at last ?'

'Yes, a brother brush recommended me to a new illustrated weekly, the "Picturesque News," when it started. They liked what I did, and by-and-by gave me regular work. Paid me two guineas a week—magnificent, wasn't it—and sure ; that was what I liked. Presently they raised it to five, and sent me abroad once or twice as "special." I took to that.'

'You are a linguist ?'

'Moderate ; thanks to my dear mother. And it was such stirring work ; always on the move. One year in the United States, the next in Turkey, in the wars ; first on one side, then on the other ; at Court ceremonials, international exhibitions, a trip to Salt Lake City, or to the Sandwich Islands, home by Japan.'

‘ How exciting ! ’

‘ Yes, for a time; but I got sick of it; I never knew what it was to have a settled home. I was tired of vagabondising all over the world. Besides, what good was I doing ? Making myself useful, perhaps, in a way, purveying pictorially to the modern thirst for news ; but I had an ambition to be something more than the successful “ special ” of an illustrated paper. I was craving to put my hand to greater work. I wanted to paint pictures, pictures which might win me fame ; which perhaps might live, if not long, at least beyond the span of the bound-up volumes of the “ Picturesque News.” ’

‘ What did you do ? ’

‘ I gave all my spare time to the study of *technique*. I was in Paris just then, and I entered Minaudet’s studio. It’s two years since, and I begin now to feel my way.’

‘ Have you done anything big as yet ? Did you exhibit this year ? ’

‘ Well, yes.’

He was a little hurt at the question. His

picture had made some stir, at least so he had imagined. Other artists had talked about it, so had the critics. It had been hung in a prominent place, and sold well, to Christison, the dealer, from Smokingham.

‘What was it? Landscape, figures, or both? Do tell me.’

‘Never mind, Miss Forsyth. Some other day you shall hear. Pictures can’t be expected to interest you. You never go to the Academy, I presume?’

‘I do. The very first day.’

‘On account of the bonnets? They’re more in your line, of course.’

‘What impertinence! You shall be punished for it. Here comes the carriage; I shall hand you over once more to the tender mercies of Lady Clementina.’

‘No, no, please; anything but that.’

‘You can tell her about the Gorge of Gondo, and the Fleischörn, and, and anything else that comes into your head.’

‘O, Mr. Gwynne!’ at this moment cried Lady Clementina, ‘I have been wanting you

so much all this time. It seems such a sin to leave this magnificent pass without transferring some of it to paper. What do you think? We are quite early. We have all the day before us. Shall we halt for a bit, and do a subject? A recollection of the Simplon Route, with the Road, and the Rocks——'

‘And a few Alps thrown in,’ suggested Winnifred. ‘Be a good boy, Mr. Gwynne, and do as you’re told.’

‘It would be so singularly effective. Now *do* let us try?’

What could Dominic say?

They had lunched at Isella, they were to dine at Simplon, and pass the night there. The village was not many miles ahead, and they had several hours to spare. With rather a rueful face, the chagrin of which was intensified by Winnifred’s malicious smile, he consented.

‘I shall push on,’ Winnifred said, directly.

‘Surely you had better not. If you arrive at Simplon by yourself, it will seem so odd.’

“ Eggleton shall come with me.’

‘ You can’t well lose yourself this time,’  
Dominic permitted himself to remark, by  
way of revenge. ‘ But don’t expect any  
assistance if you do.’

Winnifred disdained to answer, and pre-  
sently disappeared, followed by the some-  
what unwilling maid.

It is to be feared that the advice tendered  
to Lady Clementina after Winnifred’s de-  
parture was of little practical value. He was  
in no enviable frame of mind, chafing, fum-  
ing, but unable openly to exhibit his dis-  
content. Throughout he continued dis-  
traught, or if he spoke it was merely to  
recommend the most impossible combination  
of colours, or encourage the most wilfully  
incorrect drawing. His thoughts had tra-  
velled on after Winnifred, and he longed to  
follow too.

So the hours slipped by, but very slowly,  
till the shadows began to lengthen on the  
road. Then the evening diligence came  
rumbling along down the steep incline, and

roused Lady Clementina's coachman, who had been asleep by his horses' heads. He looked anxious now : it was time to get forward he said, time to stable his beasts and give them their corn. The air was chill and damp, the sun gone ; Dominic also wished to be on the move. If Lady Clementina had no objection, he would also walk ahead. She had ; every objection. She could not be left alone, with a strange driver on a wild mountain road. There was no help for it. Dominic was compelled to remain with the carriage, but he trudged slowly along by its side, not seated in it. He could not have endured patiently Lady Clementina's voluminous platitudes as they toiled up the last long hill.

But Simplon was reached at last, and Dominic's spirits rose at the prospect of rejoining Winnifred and making his peace. Leaving Lady Clementina to the ministrations of Eggleton, who came out at once, he ran on upstairs to the little coffee-room, where he hoped to find Miss Forsyth.

She was there, chatting very pleasantly to a strange man. Nodding to Dominic, she said briefly,

‘So you’ve got here?’ as if there could be any doubt about it, and went on talking to her companion.

The stranger was clearly the man in possession, and he looked at Dominic asking so plainly ‘Who the mischief are you?’ that her friend felt compelled to speak in explanation.

‘We’re very late, I know; but Lady Clementina would stay to finish her sketch.’

Whereupon the stranger, who had gone to the window, cried,

‘Why, here she is! I’ll run down, Winnifred, and meet her.’

Lady Clementina started as if at an apparition—

‘What, Bobby! have you dropped from the sky?’

‘No, only from the top of the diligence. I am on my way to Brindisi, and I thought I’d come by this route, as there was a chance

of seeing you. Uncle Ferdinand told me you were still at Pallanza. I meant to have halted there for a day or two, when, by the merest fluke, I met Winnifred here, at the door of the inn.'

'You've been speaking to her?'

'Oh, yes! It was quite like old times.'

'You are cured, I hope. There is no danger of a *réchute*?'

'I shall never be cured of this particular complaint, aunt. But it's a hopeless case. I can see she's just the same as ever.'

'It would have been far better if you'd gone on in the diligence.'

'I suppose so. But I couldn't help myself when I saw her. I can't forget her. I'm a great, hulking, stupid ass—not a bit clever, I know—not fit to clean her boots; but I'd do that, or make them, if she asked me.'

'What you see in her passes my comprehension. But you're not the only one, I know.'

'Do you mean that there's anyone fresh in the field?' Captain FitzHugh said, with

a sudden jealous pang. 'Who's this fellow you've got with you? Where did you pick him up?'

'Oh! he? That's Mr. Gwynne, an artist whom we met at Venice. Of course I do not refer to him. Winnifred loathes the sight of him.'

'Does she, indeed!' thought Bobby, as he returned to the coffee-room laden with rugs and shawls. 'They seem monstrous good friends.'

Dominic was standing at the window with Winnifred. He seemed to be talking to her earnestly, and he held her hand in his.

But Winnifred promptly turned the scent.

'It's a mere scratch, Mr. Gwynne. You can hardly see the wound; only sometimes there is a danger of poison with these mountain thorns.'

'I should wash it with a little cold water,' Dominic said readily, relinquishing the hand as though his surgical examination were ended.

Was FitzHugh deceived? He was not

very quick-witted ; but the artifice here was a little too plain. If she had hurt her hand, why not mention it sooner ? In the hour or two they had sat together—Bobby and she—without waiting for this painter man ?

‘Mr. Gwynne is an artist, Bobby,’ Winnifred went on. ‘He is specially strong in drawing thorns.’

‘And hands, fore-shortened,’ added Dominic, thereby completing the guardsman’s mystification.

It beat Bobby into fits, as he said, in his own graphic language. He could not understand. It was a ‘chalk affair ;’ he was ‘out of it,’ and more to the same effect.

But he had his suspicions, and they were further aroused in the course of the evening. He could have sworn that he heard this Mr. Gwynne call Miss Forsyth ‘Winnifred’ to her face. They certainly were uncommonly thick. Could there be anything between them ? Ought he not to put Lady Clementina upon her guard ? Something

might be going on right under her nose, and she perfectly unconscious.

Then it occurred to him that it would be mean to spoil sport. Although he had himself failed, surely he might allow another to try to succeed ? And was it likely that this new man was really favoured ? Was it not far more probable that Winnifred was playing the old game ? If so, there would be a rude shock for him, as there had been for many others already. Forecasting this, and smarting much from his old wound, FitzHugh began to pity Dominic, and to consider it would be kinder to warn him in time. Then he changed again. What business was it of his ? Let the stranger look out for himself. The poor devil might suffer for it ; so had others, and it served them right for having been such fools. In any case, Bobby owned to no special mission as the champion and protector of his fellow-men when they were playing with fire.

Over and over again, that evening, Winnifred eyed Captain FitzHugh keenly. How

much had he made out? How much did he know? Anything or nothing? Only once had he referred to the wounded hand; but he had done so, she thought—being guilty—with some intention in his voice, and Winnifred could have shaken him for his extra solicitude.

So, dreading an *éclaircissement*, she felt it would be politic to make much of Bobby, to pet and encourage him somewhat in the old style.

The others could not fail to perceive this. Lady Clementina noticed it with some inward misgivings; but they were tempered by hopes that perhaps Winnifred was recanting the error of her ways. As for Bobby FitzHugh, he was brought down flying; he began to regain courage, to aspire anew, to wonder whether he need go to India at all. Only Dominic was rendered absolutely and abjectedly wretched, and showed it unmistakably in his face.

Winnifred saw that he was miserable at once, and with half an eye. It distressed

her considerably. Yet what was she to do? On no account could she permit even an inkling to transpire of the real state of affairs.

So they were all at cross purposes. Bobby FitzHugh in a fool's paradise; his aunt approving mildly, and very gracious to Winnifred; Winnifred herself acting a part she detested and desired to renounce as soon as she could; Dominic brooding over his wrongs, sulky, refusing to be mollified, not even by the bright look his faithless lady-love gave him, when she thought it safe to catch his eye, nor yet by the perceptible squeeze of her hand when they parted for the night.

The artist and the soldier smoked a pipe together after the ladies had retired. It was hardly probable that they would agree well. They had few subjects in common, and they were—or fancied themselves—rivals. At first they sniffed and snarled at each other like two dogs preparing to fight. But the tobacco presently soothed them down; this, and the con-

tempt, rapidly developed in each at the other's qualifications. Captain FitzHugh was an ass—so Dominic wrote him down directly—without a second idea in his head. On the other hand, Bobby called the painter conceited, ignorant, over-bearing, knowing nothing of society, or of horses, or, indeed, of his own profession.

‘ You’ve heard of Nivison, I daresay,’ Bobby had said, by way of introducing a congenial topic.

‘ No ; really I cannot say I have.’

‘ He’s an artist, though.’

‘ Do you know all the soldiers in the army ? ’

‘ That’s ridiculous ! But Nivison’s A 1—first chop. He does dogs.’

‘ Sells them ? ’

‘ *No* ; paints them, and horses.’

‘ What part of them, the hoofs or the tails ? Don’t it rub off ? I’ve heard it’s an old trick.’

‘ Their portraits, I mean,’ said the Captain, rather tetchily. ‘ He’s done my three chargers, and the horse that won the regimental sweep.

Three guineas a-piece I paid for them. Do you think it was dear ?'

' Probably as much as they were worth. I trust you intend to bequeath your art treasures to the nation.'

' Have you ever drawn a horse ?' went on Bobby.

' Once ; in a Derby lottery. Have you ever ridden one ?'

' Why, I am in the cavalry !'

' And I am a professional artist.'

' What's that got to do with it ?'

Dominic puffed out a volume of smoke, but said nothing for a while. Then feeling that he had been rather churlish and rude, by way of making amends he introduced the general question of modern cavalry.

' To which do you belong ? Light or heavy's ?'

' I am in the Scarlet Guards,' Bobby said, with a slight drawl, as though further information was unnecessary.

' Heavy's, are they ?'

' Why, of course.'

Where could this man have been raised ?

‘ They used to say that the days of heavy cavalry were over, did they not, till the affair at Langensalza ? ’

‘ Don’t know, I’m sure. When was that ? ’

‘ In the campaign of 1866. You remember, when the Hanoverian cavalry fought so well. Their weight told. It was a splendid sight, certainly.’

‘ Did you see it ? ’ FitzHugh began, half impertinent, half incredulous.

‘ Nearly the whole affair.’

‘ What service were you in ? ’

‘ That of the “ Picturesque News.” ’

‘ The “ Pict—” ’ Bobby’s jaw dropped.

‘ Did they employ a cavalry regiment ? I don’t understand.’

‘ I was special correspondent only,’ Dominic said with a smile. ‘ I’ve served them, up and down, all over the world almost.’

‘ Been in India ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Deuced hot, ain’t it ? I’m going there.’

‘ So I understood. You go on in the

morning, I presume?' Dominic asked, just a little doubtfully, but hoping to see this rival's back.

'It depends. I'm not quite sure. I might return with my aunt, at least part of the way.'

Captain FitzHugh was debating with himself whether he had reason to expect a different answer from Winnifred now—whether he ought not to ask her again.

Dominic did not like the man's speech. What if he had some priority of claim upon Winnifred's regards?

'Would you care to have my seat?' he asked civilly, but meaning to find out how the land lay. 'I could walk on to Brieg.'

'On no account. There would be room enough besides, without that. But as I say, I am quite undecided; it will depend entirely on what Winnifred says to-morrow.'

This all pointed to some understanding between the cousins, and as he pondered over it, Dominic grew more and more uncomfortable. He was restless and wretched all

night, so much so, that being on the move early, he smuggled up to Winnifred, through Eggleton, a small note praying for five minutes' talk, alone, and before the others came down ; he had something most important to say.

‘ Well,’ she said, ‘ you look sufficiently glum. What is the matter with you ? ’

‘ Winnifred, I begin to wish we had never met ; that nothing had happened between us.’

‘ What has come over you—so suddenly too ? ’

‘ Winnifred, you will call me an ass, perhaps ; but I am jealous, furiously jealous. This new man——’

‘ Now do not make the ridiculous mistake of calling my cousin, Bobby FitzHugh, whom I have known all these years, a new man. But I won’t argue with you ; only you are beginning badly, that’s all.’

‘ I think it would have been better if I’d never begun.’

‘ Then let it end at once. I told you you

did not know me ; and clearly you don't, and don't wish to. I have a host of friends—great friends, like Bobby FitzHugh. Do you think I mean to renounce them all, at one swoop ? Certainly not. And if you don't like it, you can withdraw as soon as it seems good to you.'

' And surrender my place to Captain Fitz-Hugh ? '

' That's if I choose him to fill it.'

' He told me last night that he thought of turning back a bit of the way with you. He was only waiting for you to decide.'

' If he asks me, I shall say come by all means. He is my cousin. I am fond of him. He gives himself no airs.'

' You wish to dismiss me ? Please speak plainly.'

' Say rather, you wish to dismiss yourself, by your foolish, injudicious method of managing your affairs.'

Bobby came in at the moment, and Winnifred asked him with much *empressement*—

'Is it true you thought of coming back with us, Bobby ?'

'I did ; yes, if—if—'

'*Do* come. Lady Clementina would be so glad to see a little more of you, and so should I. Besides, it would be a relief to Mr. Gwynne. He's had a little too much of us lately, I think. The charge of ladies is apt to become a bore, and he says he wants to get on faster than we can travel.'

Winnifred settled the whole matter with a few more words. Lady Clementina fell in with the arrangement readily and unsuspiciously. She parted with Dominic with many courteous regrets, and 'thank you so much for all your kindness.' Bobby FitzHugh, in the seventh heaven of delight, was disposed to telegraph at once to Brindisi that his heavy baggage might be re-landed. Dominic only the very picture of woe, till with an effort he braced himself up to the occasion.

'Good-bye, then, Miss Forsyth,' and he put out his hand.

'Good-bye, Mr. Gwynne. Shall we leave

your portmanteau at Brieg, or will it follow on the diligence? Perhaps we may meet again on the road, to-day, or later ?'

' It is extremely improbable,' Dominic said coldly. ' My plans are so uncertain. I shall perhaps go South again.'

' Then *we*'—an emphasis on the pronoun—' shall not see you again ?'

' No.'

Had he replied in a different tone the quarrel might still have been made up; but he was hurt, offended—he could not forgive her her heartlessness.

' Good-bye, then. It would be useless to say *au revoir*.'

And so the rupture widened into a seemingly irreparable breach.

Half mad with his disappointment, Dominic abruptly left the inn, and walked on at a rapid pace towards the Hospice. Although the ascent was steep, he breasted it bravely, and made such good progress that the carriage never caught him up. But the diligence did; and, joining it, he reached

Brieg early, and Sierre, in time for the night train.

His luck had turned against him. Had it been otherwise he would have lingered longer upon the road, and then would have learnt that when the Forsyths drove into Brieg they were without male escort. Captain FitzHugh had left them at Hospice.

The immediate effect of her quarrel with Dominic had been to deepen her contempt for Bobby. She cut him short, in the most summary fashion, when he essayed to re-open his case. In reply to his piteous entreaty that she would re-consider her rejection of him, she said—

‘My dear Bobby, I am less likely to take you now than ever. Don’t ask me why. I don’t dislike you, at this present moment; but if you worry me any more I shall detest you most cordially.’

If Dominic had been discomfited and repulsed, Bobby was yet more ignominiously routed and driven from the field.

## CHAPTER X.

MEN take illtreatment at the hands of girls they elect to prefer, in very various fashions. This one, weak and desponding, lurks upon the bridges glowering doubtfully upon the dark flowing Thames ; that turns misogynist, or punishes himself as chief culprit by taking to drink. Not a few self-satisfied youths rapidly recover their equilibrium and go their way rejoicing, glad to be quit of the whole affair. One plan is as likely to be as successful as another, and whether drowned, defiant, or in drink, the sufferer gains at least an anodyne to his pain.

But these are cowardly methods of meeting misfortune, and none such would do for Dominic Gwynne. He was determined not to brood over what was passed. It was idle to cry over spilt milk. He would return with

renewed energy to his work and look ahead, bent only upon achieving that fame which —had she so chosen—it would have been his pride to have lain at Winnifred's feet. But that was over. As for her, he would forget her.

Brave words ! Praiseworthy resolves ! Had it been possible to carry them into effect, Dominic might have saved himself much misery present and to come. But it is not given to all men to shake off thus easily influences which have been of gradual growth, twining themselves like strong sinewy parasites around the parent stem of the heart. In spite of his earnest resistance, Dominic found his mind continually wandering back to the memory of Winnifred Forsyth.

When, a month later, he returned to London and resumed his place once more among his co-workers in the vast ant-heap of town, it was plain to all that he was hipped, out of sorts, perhaps in ill-health, certainly sore at heart. His condition gave his friends much concern. In his own little circle he

was a favourite. A cheerful companion, sympathetic, clever, there were those who predicted for him some day a great name, and to be considered upon the high road to fame certainly does not diminish the affectionate appreciation of our acquaintances and friends.

The first evening that he appeared at his favourite haunt the Zeuxis Club, he was taken to task seriously upon his looks.

It was a full night at the club. All the Zooks, as its members were familiarly styled, were back again at their work. The slack season was ended, and with it the short holiday, the brief breathing space which one and all had spent seeking rest from toil, revisiting scenes hallowed by former pleasant associations, exploring new fields, in vigorous exercise, perchance in long lazy dawdling by the sea-shore, enjoying perfect idleness with that full zest those only who are in constant harness can certainly know.

Let me pause for a moment to describe this Zeuxis Club, a small gathering of men

mostly devoted to art. It was situated in a quiet street off the Strand ; a quaint old fashioned house full of oak wainscoting, owning one or two precious bits of marble carving, having ceilings somewhat dingy perhaps but hand-painted by forgotten men. A fitting home for those who used it, although 'the Zooks' were not all artists in the ordinary acceptation of the term. More catholic was their interpretation of the word art, which embraced all who could claim to be vowed to one or other of the shrines at which it is worshipped.

Thus there were among its members not painters only but actors also, many musicians, architects, one or two *savants*, and a host of *littérateurs*. As a general rule, no gossiping dilettanti idlers found favour here ; no pretentious prigs calmly contemptuous of all they saw or heard as though they might do or say much better things at a moment's notice if they only cared to try. The Zooks, almost to a man, were industrious, hard-working fellows, following each his own calling

with business-like thoroughness and vigour. Young for the most part, but they owned Nestors too, grey-haired seniors who had shot their bolts and made no very special mark in the world ; but these were few, and they were respected rather for their lightheartedness or sympathetic approval than the breadth of their experience of life.

The Zooks were boisterous at times, self-asserting, having no strongly developed bumps of veneration among them, inclined to run a muck at the exaggerated pretensions or reputation of others beyond their number, but they were always true to themselves. All were animated by the most unbounded loyalty to one another. A few professional jealousies and small rivalries perhaps cropped up here and there, but there was no cliqueism within the club. The artists were not of one manner or of one school. Landscape shook hands with the figure, watercolour was not disdained by oil, the wood draughtsman and the etcher found his calling respected ; there was room also in the Zeuxis for the house-

decorator and the artist in stained glass. In literature there was the same tolerance. The critics here took out their fangs and pleasantly smoothed the ruffled plumage of their victims. The great tragedian, again, forgot to frown, and sometimes took his turn with a comic song, a great professor upon the violoncello smiled approval at meritorious attempts upon the small-tooth comb or the Jews' harp.

A very cheerful, sociable *coterie* was that of the Zeuxis Club, where good-fellowship and friendliness reigned supreme.

A shout greeted Dominic's entrance.

'All hail!' shouted big Billy FitzWilliam, of the Royal Duke's. Big-headed Billy, who played low comedy parts to perfection, and thought all the time his forte lay in Hamlet or Pericles, Prince of Tyre.

'How goes it, Nick? Indifferent ill I trow? Been crossed in love? Hast proved the plaything of the blind boy-god?'

'Come down off your stilts, Billy, or you'll fall and hurt yourself.'

'He is in love: I swear it.'

‘Don’t do it, Dominic ; you’ll repent it all your life,’ said another, a waspish, snappish, middle-aged man; Greatorex, commonly called ‘Guy,’ although his Christian name was Gilbert. He looked a guy generally, and dressed as only gentlemen can in the oldest and shabbiest clothes. He was a gentleman of the best, born and bred, had borne a colonel’s commission in Her Majesty’s Guards, and belonged of right to the best society in the land, but he preferred the Zooks’. Since he had sold out years back for reasons that will presently be told, he had devoted himself entirely to art.

‘Don’t get married, Nick,’ he repeated.

‘If you do, save your Saturdays out of the wreck.’

A Saturday dinner was an established institution at the Zooks’, held early to allow the actors to leave in time to appear upon the boards. This was one of the first of such dinners, and the attendance promised to be large. The men stood about in groups, and there was a loud hubbub of talk ; at

times the voices rose into a chorus as each new arrival was welcomed

‘What, Grimston ! whence ?’

‘Landed from Lapland this morning.’

‘And Giles ! Had a good time, Giles ?’

‘Went to Spain. Nearly got into a revolution ; and they promised to “pass me by the arms ;” shoot me, in fact.’

‘Eccolo ! Room for the excellentissimo Signore Bertolazzo dei Bertolazzi.’

Bertolazzo the piccolo-player, famed far and wide, who spoke the most indifferent English, but was at heart the most enthusiastic Briton that ever ate roast beef.

‘Been to your native land, Berto ?’

‘Is my native land England, to live ?  
No ? If one say is not English, I, is all lies.  
Dam : I don’t care.’

His manner of talk was jerky, the voice tremendously deep and sonorous. His words struck on your tympanum like the notes of a big drum played *con strepito*. He used oaths frequently, thinking it showed a knowledge of idiomatic English.

‘Had much maccaroni out yonder, Berto ?

‘Is food I loathe. Dam.’

The truth being that Berto, without supplies of his favourite paste at intervals daily, would have incontinently died.

‘Ye gods ! Spilsby in evening clothes. Didn’t know he had them. Going out to wait, Spilsby ?’

‘Yes ; for you, outside, to lick you. So now you know.’

‘Why, it’s the first night of Spilsby’s play. Nebuchadenezzar or the king at grass. Going to be damned, Spilsby ?’

‘Consider yourself so, now.’

‘The same to you and no worse, old boy.’

‘Halloo ! here’s the Infant ; where’s the nurse and the perambulator ?’

Handsome old Stevens, the landscape painter, went by the name of the Infant. He was as old as the hills, but as full of youthful fire and enthusiasm as the veriest chicken in the club. He looked like a colonel of dragoons, with his erect figure and long drooping, white moustache. He is old, but it is a green old

age. Full of his work, always tremendously busy, as now when he has several big pictures on hand for the exhibition in the coming spring.

‘Back for good, Stevens?’

‘Not at all. I’ve only run up for a night at the Club. I’m doing a winter subject at Cookham. Bare trees, rich brown earth—splendid colour is wet brown earth.’

‘Working from the window?’

‘Window!’ Stevens was most scornful.  
‘No, out of doors, of course.’

‘At your tender age! It’ll be your death.’

‘Bah! Extra coat or two, that’s all. You try them—on your back, not on the picture. Who’s here?’

‘All the world.’

‘Without his wife.’

‘No, the wives stay at home on Saturdays. Glad to see you, Dominic. Were you “out” this year?’

‘Yes, Venice and the Italian lakes.’

‘Ah, *mon Neek*, you have been on the

*voyage, hein ?*' cried Lubbock, a little man who had once spent a month or two in France. Since that his sole aim was to pass for a Frenchman wherever he went. He dressed the part, or as he read the part, spoke broken English which was the nearest approach he could make to French, having nothing beyond a small monosyllabic acquaintance with the language in question.

'But you have the *mal air, mon Neek*. It is your English fogs, the *broom* we call it, and they have given you a *coff—a toux*.'

'How charming is his accent!'

'How fluent his tongue!'

'What's the news?' Dominic asked, by way of shielding Lubbock.

'Broad's at his last gasp.'

Broad, an old academician, had long been failing.

'Who's to come in?'

'Stimperson of course. There'll be three associates too. That ought to take you in, Dominic.'

‘Aha !’ he laughed aloud, ‘not yet awhile. I’m in no hurry either.’

Not now, not now ; but what if Winnifred was to be won thereby ?

‘There’s Lubbock here, he’d have a first-rate chance, only he’s a foreigner.’

‘It is my glory,’ cried the little apostate. ‘You English, you think you can paint—pouf ! that for you ; you have no knowledge, no education, no *technique* ; you have not learnt to draw, still less to paint.’ In his excitement he grew idiomatic. ‘There are none of you who will live—your works will not survive. Those who buy them will find themselves in the box—in what you call the wrong box.’

The little man, to carry out the part, was gesticulating wildly, when someone, as dinner was announced, took him up bodily and carried him to a seat.

The dinner was, like the rest of its kind, as pleasant as champagne. Quips and jests and ready repartee were bandied freely to and fro, exchange of recent experiences, plans for

another year, gossip of coming events, and of those who actually occupied the town. One topic on every tongue was a wondrous picture by one already known to fame ; a picture of a great and awful subject treated with solemn pathos and power.

‘Have you seen it, *Greatorex*?’ Dominic asked.

‘No, I have not. I prefer to be in the proud minority. I shall be sickened with it ; it will be on every tongue. I shall be asked my opinion—not that it’s worth much, but I shall be asked, and I can answer at once, “I have not seen it. I don’t want to see it.” That will be a damper, and will stop the subject.’

‘It’s a tremendously fine thing,’ Stevens said. ‘It quite took my breath away.’

‘There. I call that criticism. That’s a tribute to a man’s genius. It simply takes our breath away. Anyone who can produce that effect must have genius, and we should respect it.’

‘What are they talking about?’ asked

deaf old Fladgate; a curious snuffy old owl who never came out before dark.

‘The great picture—Heron Knight’s.’

‘Who’s seen it? Have you, Greatorex?’ and Fladgate leant forward, shading his ear with his hand.

‘No, I have NOT.’ He was quite angry at the question after what he had said.

‘What’s he savage about? What makes him look so glum?’ went on old Fladgate.

‘Take a glass of wine, Dominic,’ said Greatorex, by way of diversion. ‘*You* look glum enough too. What’s the matter?’

Dominic made a poor effort to laugh off the question, but soon relaxed into his former dejection.

It was plain that he was out of sorts. But his friends respected his reticence and left him in peace. Men may lack the peculiar tact which enables the woman to pour in oil and bind up wounds, but they are not without considerateness and discretion. Dominic’s mind evidently was preoccupied, burdened with some care; it was kindest to

leave him to himself. In his own good time he might be disposed to unbosom himself ; meanwhile, if he preferred it, he might remain absolutely dumb.

Only when the cloth was removed and with tobacco came the lighter moments when song followed song, when recitations, imitations, humorous speeches kept the company in roars, Dominic felt himself out of place. Presently he got up and left the room. He saw no fun, for the first time, in all this nonsense ; it jarred upon him, he longed for a quiet corner where he might be alone with his thoughts.

He was still brooding over his wrongs, alternately upbraiding himself with his overweening folly, and taking Winnifred to task, when Guy Greatorex came into the room. Drawing up a chair, he said :

‘ Shall I bore you ? you seem hipped. I want to hear all about your holiday and your work.’

He spoke in a kindly, sympathetic tone, most unusual with this rather cross-grained

misanthropic old creature. But Dominic was a favourite with him, one in whom he took an especial interest, although he pretended there was little now to interest him in the whole wide world.

Years back Gilbert Greatorex had been one of the gayest and brightest of all the light-hearted youngsters in Her Majesty's Guards. When the Crimean War was over he was a lieutenant-colonel, already distinguished, a good soldier, decorated, fond of his profession. In ability he was far above the average men of his class, having many gifts ; he was a good musician, a facile artist, an amateur actor of considerable power. Having ample means, an unexceptionable position, an engaging presence, he found himself welcome wherever he went. All society was at his feet. When it came home to him at five-and-thirty, with the irresistible logic of increasing years, that it was high time he married, he saw that he had only to choose. He had always been made much of, but now, when it was known that he wanted a wife, Belgravian mothers were more

than ever prodigal of encouragement, and their daughters of smiles. But he was so difficult to please ; so changeable. To-day he was taken by this girl's looks, to-morrow captivated by that girl's mind ; now demureness charmed him, then he found fastness irresistible. It was to this last type that he fell a victim. Miss Skewliffe had adopted the dangerous tactics of going almost to extreme lengths ; she flirted with him in a way which seriously compromised herself. Evil tongues had begun to clack, the fangs had fastened upon her reputation and would soon have torn it into shreds, when Colonel Greatorex, with an impulse of chivalry, shielded her effectually and silenced all talk by marrying her out of hand.

His generosity merited better treatment at her hands. But she was heartless, without self-respect, scornfully despising the sober joys of domestic life, vowed only to the world and its pleasures. Greatorex, having now the desire to settle down, found no such inclination in the wife he had chosen, and

soon realised the mistake he had made in marrying her. Worse was in store. A year or two of the freedom of a frisky matron was too much for Mrs. Greatorex's discretion, and ere long she began to be talked about. No whispers reached her husband's ears till suddenly the worst blow fell all at once. She had gone off with an Austrian count, one of the *attachés* at the Embassy, who had long been at her feet.

Greatorex was only heard of vaguely after this, but once, when he had done himself the justice to shoot the Austrian through the body. He was perpetually on the move striving to escape from his shame. Now they said he was in Paris, studying art in the studio of one of the greatest living painters, next in California cattle-farming or speculating in mines ; again, in South Australia feeding sheep, or at Rome with a studio of his own, and seriously devoted to his new profession. He was already middle-aged when he reappeared in London, and found himself almost forgotten. A new generation was

in possession of the town. At his club, boys still learning their drill asked the name of the old chap with the grizzled beard ; sons and daughters reigned instead of their parents ; the very streets were changed in character, and the muddy foreshores had disappeared from the great highway of the Thames.

But his old friend 'art' was as green and youthful as ever. In the days of his dandydom he had kept up relations with the best Bohemianism then about town. He had been an industrious amateur, now and again a patron, but aspiring rather to be a co-worker and friend, and he had worked always, even when pleasure had been the serious business of his life, worked in a desultory fashion, but *con amore*, displaying unmistakable talent, although it was spasmodic and versatile. He had tried all styles : one year he was mad for etching, spent months next in mastering the manipulation of oil ; when photography came into vogue he embarked with enthusiasm upon it, and spent extravagant sums in camera, chemicals, and plant. Only after the

shipwreck of his domestic happiness had he taken to art in earnest, and although a man's fingers may be stiff at forty, the poetry is in him still, and he may still achieve skill with his brush before his eyes dim and his powers fail.

This ten odd years of steady labour, backed up by the best teaching to be obtained, gave him so much mastery over his art that when he came back to London he had a right to a higher title than that of dilettante amateur. He need not paint for bread, but he exhibited and sold his pictures, and dropping his rank, enrolled himself without hesitation as a brother of the brush. He was always happiest—as far as it was permitted to him to be happy—with artists. With them he spent his days, chiefly with the younger men, for there was a pretentiousness distasteful to him among the old. To the struggling he was secretly benevolent. Sharp as was his voice and cynical his outspoken sentiments, not far down in his heart was a rich vein of human kindness, sympathy that

was unostentatious, but which went with a full hand.

With Dominic Gwynne he had long been on terms of close intimacy. Their acquaintance, commenced years back abroad, had soon ripened into mutual friendship and esteem. Greatorex was drawn to the young fellow by the frank openness of his nature, but still more by the promise Gwynne gave of great things when he came to the full maturity of his powers. It was not a little due to Greatorex that Dominic had embarked upon the more ambitious walks of his profession.

Now they talked on together, freely and unreservedly ; of the past season, of Dominic's work, of his prospects, of the subjects he had in contemplation for the coming year. Greatorex liked the notion of the 'Lotos Eaters,' and said so.

'It's a fine thing, depend upon it. A fine thing ! Have you thought it out ?'

'Oh, yes ! to the end. Got it on to the canvas, and am well into the painting.'

'If you don't spoil it by your miserable fastidiousness. Now, Dominic, don't go wasting your time, trying this and rejecting that, and then finishing up in a devil of a hurry just at the last. You're hypercritical about yourself, you know that.'

'I only want to be honest, and do my best. This is worth an effort, I believe.'

'I should think so indeed. But what put the subject first into your head?'

Dominic did not answer. He was thinking of that autumn day as he sat over above the shining lake, among the yellow-leaved chestnut trees, with Winnifred by his side.

'She did, I suppose.'

Dominic nodded.

'I feared as much. So you are in love, boy, in love. You've caught it at last. It comes always, inevitably; you must have it, like the measles and chicken pox. Have you taken it badly? What stage are you in—sickening, convalescent, given over? Which is it, Nick?'

'The whole affair is a most unpleasant

reminiscence. I should prefer not to talk about it.'

'Don't then,' Greatorex said with a grim laugh, adding, as he saw Dominic's face fall, 'You know you are as keen to have it out as if it were an aching tooth. Go on. When did it happen? Some one you met abroad?'

'Yes; at Venice. Then at the lakes. I gave her lessons in sketching.'

'From nature? Idyllic *tête-à-tête*. Nature has much to answer for. Go on. Make a clean breast of it. Confession will do you good.'

'We were constantly thrown together—often quite alone. How could I help it? Five weeks of it would have conquered even you.'

'I don't believe it.'

'Then we came over the Simplon together. Still all right. Just a little scuffle one afternoon, and then we stumbled suddenly upon another man, a fellow who had come all the way on purpose to meet her. She threw

me over then and there—gave me my *conge* as coolly as though I were the most casual friend.'

'If not too indiscreet, might I enquire the young lady's name?'

'Miss Forsyth—Winnifred Forsyth.'

'I thought as much.'

'Why?' Dominic nearly leapt out of his chair. 'Do you know her?'

'All about her, at any rate.'

'I defy you to say you know anything against her.'

'Not if you are going to lose your temper over it in advance. You must have been badly hit.'

'I may have been. Miss Forsyth is nothing to me now; still I cannot let anyone asperse her character without saying a word in her defence.'

'I never aspersed her character. Not a single word against her passed my lips.'

'Your tone and look implied a good deal.'

'I admire your chivalry, Nick, but I'm sorry for you. I cannot, in your present

condition, tell you to dismiss her from your thoughts; that would be wasting breath. I can only wish you a speedy cure.'

'I beg of you, Greatorex, as one of my best and oldest friends, to speak out plainly. You cannot pretend that you know any harm of Miss Forsyth?'

'It depends upon what you call harm. She has the reputation of being, simply, the most arrant coquette in London.'

'Do you know her yourself?'

'I've never met her; but I've heard of her, I tell you, again and again. In plain language, she is a man-eater, one who gobbles up young men as you do oysters.'

'It's a disgraceful libel!'

'Are you not yourself a case in point? Believe me, Dominic, I am right. She has been the talk of the town for the last two or three seasons.'

Dominic looked as if he would like to kick the town, from one end to the other.

'There is not a word against her, mind you; she is propriety itself. She is not

exactly a flirt—not in the common meaning of the word, nor is she what is called “fast,” only she has the knack of making men fond of her, so they tell me—but you must know whether or not it is true—and when they come forward she laughs them to scorn. This may not have been the case with you.’

Was it, or was it not? Dominic, looking back through the lake episode, could not absolve her of coquetry; but yet it seemed unpremeditated, and what had happened had come about quietly and naturally, or as much so as such matters generally do.

‘I firmly believe it would have been all right but for this cousin we met—Captain FitzHugh.’

‘I know. He is in the Scarlet Guards. A great, hulking, good-natured, empty-headed chap, who could not hide his woes. I used to see him last year fit to hang himself. But he was only one victim out of the crowd. There was Jack Grantham, and Beauty Sebright, and the Lord knows who besides—all excellent *partis*.’

‘She cannot be called mercenary then.’

‘No, no ; I do not accuse her of that. She is only frivolous, not to be relied upon, incapable of any depth of feeling. Some day she will marry—right well, of course ; take the man her friends provide ; make what they will call in every way a desirable match. Meanwhile she goes about like a female free lance, and bowls everybody over.’

‘I’d rather not listen to you, Greatorex. I am foolish, idiotic ; but I will confess I half believe in her still. I feel that but for my own stupid jealousy matters would have turned out otherwise ; that if I had behaved differently we might have come together. It is I, and not she, who is principally to blame.’

‘Dominic,’ said Greatorex, speaking slowly and seriously, ‘I thank Heaven you have not come together. How she treated you, whether you or she were most in the wrong, I do not care to enquire—I don’t want to know—but this I do know, and I tell you plainly and in all sober seriousness, that such a girl as Winifred Forsyth would never do for your wife.

She was not cut out for it ; she is not fit for it. Wait——'

Dominic wished to stop him.

‘She is not the right person to be a painter’s wife—certainly not that of a rising man like yourself, one of whom we all expect great things. A gad-about, a narrow-minded, pleasure-loving, fashionable damsel, without an idea in her head beyond balls, and routs, and drawing-rooms, and drums ; who would insist upon going here, and upon your taking her there, and if you would not take her, would go without you ; who would fill your house with her aristocratic friends to worry you, to laugh at your quiet ways, to deprive you of all power of concentrated work ; without one flash of sympathy for you or your art——’

‘There you wrong her. She is herself no mean artist, and thoroughly enjoys everything connected with art.’

‘She made you think so ; that was her guile. When she talks to a bishop her whole soul is concentrated upon church matters ; to

a soldier, she swears there is no joy but in following the drum. A girl like that can make a man believe whatever she chooses.'

'But, Greatorex, there is no necessity to go on any more. Everything, I tell you, is at an end between us.'

'And I'm heartily glad of it. They're demons, fiends. No words are strong enough to stigmatise these flirting, flaunting, London girls.'

The old chap's eyes flashed fire, and he shook back his grey locks with fierce energy, as he warmed with his subject.

'I know them, I tell you. My experience was gained years ago, when I was like yourself, young and trusting, and full of hope. But for one of them I might have now a happy home, children—sons in whom to renew my youth; daughters to be my comfort and my pride. What matter? My woes should be forgotten by this time; at least, I need not inflict them upon you. But take warning by me; thank Heaven you have escaped. It is better so; a little present

pain is better than a long future of suffering, which would leave you just such a cross-grained, disappointed old curmudgeon as you see me now.'

Was Winnifred really what Greatorex described her? She was wayward, thoughtless, provoking; but surely not desperately wicked.

'No, no, Dominic,' went on the other. 'You are well out of it, believe me. If you must marry—although I cannot see the necessity yet awhile, you have time enough to spare—choose some quiet, domestic little body from a brother-artist's modest home, some unaffected, simple, warm-hearted soul, who will prove in every way a helpmate and a friend; who will nurse you, encourage, caution you by turns; whose chief pride will be in you and in your pictures; who will wash your brushes, and give you advice, and be in every respect the best kind of companion and pal. But for Heaven's sake don't rush into society to pick up there a fashionable wife.'

'What you've got to do is to stick to your

work, steadfastly and thoroughly. Go on doing your best, your level best. Work, and look ahead. Remember there are quite as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. The time will come when you can fill your basket, if you choose, with a splendid fish, only too glad to be caught by the great and illustrious Dominic Gwynne.'

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